

A  
SAINT INDEED :  
OR  
*THE GREAT WORK*  
OF A  
CHRISTIAN

OPENED AND PRESSED

*From Prov. iv. 23.*

Being a seasonable and proper expedient for the  
recovery of the much decayed power of godli-  
ness among the professors of these times.

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BY JOHN FLAVEL,  
Minister of the Gospel.

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The  
Epistle Dedicatory

To my dearly beloved and longed for, the flock of *Jesus Christ* in *Dartmouth*, over whom the *Holy Ghost* hath made me an overseer, sound judgement, true zeal, and unstained purity, is heartily wished.

*My Dear Friends,*

THERE are three sad sights with which our eyes should continually affect our hearts. The first is to behold in every place so many profane and dissolute ones, who bear the very image of Satan ; the face of whose conversation plainly discovers what they are, and whither they are going, *Philip. iii.18, 19*. These look like themselves, the children of wrath The second is to see so many cursed hypocrites artificially disguising themselves, and with marvelous dexterity acting the parts of saints, so that even a judicious eye may sometimes mistake the *similar workings* of the Spirit on them, for his *saving workings* on others : to hear such a person conferring, praying, bewailing his corruptions, and talking of his experiences, would easily persuade a man to believe, that he hath the heart as well as the face of a sincere Christian. So the people of God do speak, so they pray, and even so they open their conditions : these look like saints, but are none. The third is to see so many real saints, in whom the Spirit of truth is, who get through the impetuous workings of their corruptions, and neglecting of the watch over their own hearts, do often fall into such scandalous practices, that they look like hypocrites, though they are not so.

These are three sad sights indeed, and O that my head were water, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep abundantly over them all !

For the first I would mourn heartily, considering that they (so continuing) must be damned eternally, *2 Thes. i. 8, 9. 1 Cor. vi. 9*.

For the second, I would both weep and tremble, considering that they (so abiding) must be damned doubly, *Matt. xxiv. 51*.

And for the third, no less than any of the rest, because though

they themselves may and shall be saved, yet they themselves make fast the bonds of death upon both the former, *Matt. xviii. 7. 2 Sam. xii. 13, 14.*

Alas ! That ever they should shed the blood of other's souls, for whom Christ shed his blood ! that ever they should be so *cruel* to others, who have found Christ so *kind* to them ! I know they dare not do it directly and intentionally, but so it proves occasionally and eventually. Suffer me here to digress a little, and expostulate with these prejudiced and hardened souls ; I will presently return to you again. O why do you mischief your own souls by other men's examples ? Because they stumble and break their bones, will you fall and break your necks ? I desire all such as harden themselves by these things, and take up a good opinion of their own deplorable condition, would soberly consider and answer these three queries.

*1 Query.* Doth religion in any way countenance or patronize the sinful practices of its professors, or doth it not rather impartially and severely condemn them ? It is the glory of the Christian religion that it is pure and undefiled, *Jam. i. 21* ; no doctrine so holy, *Ps. x. 8* ; nor doth any make more provision for an holy life, *Tit. ii. 11, 12*. Indeed there is a case wherein we may charge the evil practices of men upon their principles, but that is when their practices naturally flow from, and necessarily follow their principles ; as for example, if I see a Papist sin boldly, I may charge it upon his principles, for they set pardons to sale, and so make way for looseness. If I see an Arminian slight the grace of God, and proudly advance himself, I may cry shame upon his principles which directly lead to it. But can I do so where such practices are condemned and provided against by their own avowed principles that commit them ?

*2 Query.* Is it not a most irrational thing to let fly at religion because of the scandalous ways of some, whilst in the mean time you wholly slight and overlook the holy and heavenly conversation of many others ? Are all that profess godliness loose and careless in their lives ? No, some are an ornament to their profession, and the glory of Christ. And why must the innocent be condemned with the guilty ? Why the eleven for one Judas ?

*3 Query.* If you condemn religion because of the scandalous lives of some that profess it, must you not then cast off all religion in

the world, and turn downright Atheists ? Surely this is the consequence of it ; for what religion is there, but some that profess it walk contrary to their profession ; and then, as *Constantine* told the Novatian, you must set up your ladder and go to heaven by yourself.

But alas ! it is not our printed apologies for religion, but the visible reformation of its professors, that must both serve its honor, and remove those fatal stumbling blocks at which the blind world strikes and falls into eternal perdition.

Now there are two ways by which this may be effected : first, by convincing the consciences of professors of their miscarriages, and the evil and aggravations of them. Secondly, by medicating the heart, and cleansing the fountain whence they proceed. In the first of these, a worthy and eminent servant of Christ hath lately laboured, holding a clear gospel-glass before the faces of professors, which truly represents their spots and blemishes. If he that reads it will consider, apply, and practice, it shall doubtless turn to his salvation, but if it turn to no good account to him that reads it, I know it shall turn to a testimony for him that wrote it. The second, is a principal design of this small treatise, the subject whereof is exceeding weighty, and of daily use to the people of God, though the manner of handling it be attended with many defects and weaknesses. Every one cannot be excellent who may yet be useful.

I will exercise your patience no longer than whilst I tell you,

1. Why I published it to the view of the world.

2. Why I direct it particularly to you.

First, for the publication of it, take this sincere and brief account, that as I was led to this subject by a special providence, so as to the publication of it by a kind of necessity. The providence at first leading me to it was this : a dear and choice friend of my intimate acquaintance being under much inward trouble, upon the account of some special heart disorder, opened the case to me, and earnestly requested some rules and helps in that particular ; whilst I was bending my thoughts to that special case, divers other cases of like importance (some of which were dependent upon that consideration) occurred to my thoughts, and this scripture which I have insisted upon, presented itself as a fit foundation for the whole discourse, which being lengthened out to what you see, divers friends requested me to transcribe for their use, divers of the cases here handled, and some

others begged me to publish the whole, to which I was in a manner necessitated, to save the pains of transcribing, which to me is a very tedious and tiresome work ; and, just as I had almost finished the copy, an opportunity presented (and that somewhat strangely) to make it public. So that from first to last I have been carried beyond my intentions in this thing.

*Objection.* If any say, the world is even cloyed with books, and therefore though the discourse be necessary, yet the publication is needless.

*Solution.*

1. I answer, there are multitudes of books indeed, and of them many concern not themselves about root truths, and practical godliness, but spend their strength upon impractical notions, and frivolous controversies. Many also strike at root truths, and endeavor to undermine the power of godliness ; and some there are that nourish the root, and tend to clear and confirm, to prepare and apply, the great truths of the gospel, that there may be bread for the souls to live and feed on. Now, though I could wish that those that have handled the pen of the scribe, had better employed their time and pains than to obtrude such useless discourses upon the world, yet to the books of the latter rank, I say, that when husbandmen complain of too much corn let Christians complain of too many such books.

2. And if you be so highly conceited of your own furniture and ability, that such books are needless ; if you let them alone they will do you no hurt, and other poor hungry souls will be glad of them, and bless God for what you despise and leave.

*Objection.* If it be said that several of the cases here handled touch not your condition, I answer,

*Solution 1.* That which is not your condition may be another's condition. If you be placed in an easy, full, and prosperous state, and so have no need of the helps here offered, to support your heart under pinching wants, others are forced to live by faith for every day's provision ; if you be dandled on the knee of providence, some of your brethren are under its feet. If you have inward peace, and tranquility of spirit, and so need not the counsels here given, to ward off those desperate conclusions that poor afflicted souls are so ready to draw upon themselves at such a time, yet it may be a word in season to them,

and they may say as *David to Abigail, blessed be thou of the Lord, and blessed be thy advice.*

*Solution 2.* That may be your condition shortly, which is not your condition at present. Say not thy mountain stands strong, thou shalt never be moved ; there are changes in the right hand of the Most High, and then those truths which are little more esteemed than hedge-fruits, will be as apples of gold in pictures of silver. In *Jer. x. 11*, the prophet there teaches the Jews (who then dwelt in their own houses) how to defend their religion in *Babylon*, and what they should say to the *Chaldeans* there, and therefore that verse is written in *Chaldee*.

So much for the reasons of its publication. Next for the dedication of it to you. I was induced thereto by the consideration ;

1. Of the relation I have to you above all the people in the world ; I look upon my gifts as yours ; my time as yours, and all the talents I am trusted with as yours. It is not with you as with a woman whose husband is dead, and so is freed from the law of her husband - the relation still continues, with all the mutual duties of it.

2. By the consideration of my necessitated absence from you, I would not that personal absence should by insensible degrees untwist (as usually it doth) the cord of friendship ; and therefore have endeavoured (as absent friends use to do) to preserve and strengthen it by this small remembrance. It was *Vespasian's* answer to *Apolonius*, when he desired access for two philosophers ; *my doors (said Vespasian) are always open to philosophers, but my very breast is open to thee.* I cannot say with him, my doors are open for the free access of friends, being by a sad providence shut against myself ; but this I can say, my very breast is still open to you - you are as dear to me as ever.

3. Another inducement (and indeed the main) was the perpetual usefulness and necessity of these truths for you, which you will have continual need of. And I know few of you have such happy memories to retain, and I cannot be always with you to inculcate these things, but *litera scripta manet*, I was willing to leave this with you as a legacy, as a testimony of sincere love for, and care over you. This may counsel and direct you when I cannot ; I may be rendered useless to you by a civil or natural death, but this will outlive me ; and Oh ! that it may serve your souls when I am silent in the dust !

To hasten now to a conclusion, I have only these three requests to you, which I earnestly beseech you not to deny me ; yea, I charge you, as ever you hope to appear with comfort before the great Shepherd, do not dare to slight these requests.

1. Above all other studies in the world, study your own hearts. Waste not a minute more of your precious time about frivolous and sapless controversies ; it is reported even of *Bellarmino* (how truly I examine not) *Quodi a studiis scholastica theologic aver tereter fere nauseabundus, quoniam succo carebant liquid pietatis*, (i.e.) He turned with loathing from the study of school-divinity, because he wanted the sweet juice of piety. I had rather it should be said of you as one said of *Swinkfeldius*, (*he wanted a regular head, but not an honest heart*) than that you should have regular heads, and irregular hearts. My dear flock, I have, according to the grace given me, labored in the course of my ministry among you, to feed you with the heart-strengthening bread of practical doctrine, and I do assure you, it is far better you should have the sweet and saving impressions of gospel truths, feelingly and powerfully conveyed to your hearts, than only to understand them by a bare ratiocination, or a dry syllogistical inference. Leave trifling studies to such as have time lying on their hands, and know not how to employ it ; remember you are at the door of eternity, and have other work to do ; those hours you spend upon heart work in your closets, are the golden spots of all your time, and will have the sweetest influence unto your last hour. Never forget those sermons I preached to you upon that subject from *2 Kings* xx. 2, 3. Heart work is weighty and difficult work, and errors there may cost you your souls ; I may say of it, as *Augustine* speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity ; a man can err in nothing more easily or more dangerously. O then, study your hearts.

2. My next request is, that you will carefully look to your conversations, and be accurate in all your ways, hold forth the word of life : be sure by the strictness and holiness of your lives, to settle your selves in the very consciences of your enemies. Remember that your lives must be produced in the great day, to judge the world, *1 Cor.* vi. 2. Oh then what manner of persons ought you to be ! You have many eyes over you, the Omniscient eye of God, that searches the heart and reigns, *Rev.* ii. 23, the vigilant eye of Satan, *Job* i. 7, 8, the envious eyes of enemies that curiously observe you, *Psal.* v. 8, and the quick

observant eye of consciences which none of your actions escape, *Rom.* ix. 1.

Oh then be precise and accurate in all manner of conversation; keep up the power of godliness in your closets and families, and then you will not let it fall in your more public employments and converses in the world. I have told you often, that it is the honour of the gospel, that makes the best parents and children, the best masters and servants, the best husbands and wives in the world.

My third and last request is, that you pray for me. I hope I can say, and am sure some of you have acknowledged, that I came at first among you, as the return and answer of your prayers ; and indeed so it should be, see *Luke* x. 2. I am persuaded also, I have been carried on in my work by your prayers ; 'tis sweet when 'tis so, see *Eph.* vi. 18, 19. And I hope by your prayers to receive yet a further benefit, even that which is mentioned, *Heb.* xiii. 18, 19, *Philem.* xx. And truly it is but equal you should pray for me, as I have often prayed for you; let the pulpit, family, and closet witness for me. And God forbid I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.

Yea friends, your own interest may persuade to it ; what mercies you obtain for me, redound to your own advantage ; if God preserve me, it is for your use and service. The more gifts and graces a minister hath, the better for them that shall wait on his ministry ; the more God gives in to me, the more I shall be able to give out to you.

I will detain you no longer, but to entreat you to accept this small testimony of my great love, and have recourse to it, according as the exegences of your condition shall require. Read it con-sideringly, and obediently ; judge it not by the dress and style, but by the weight and savor of what you read. It is a good rule of Bernard, in reading books, regard not so much the science as the savor. That it may prove the savor of life unto life unto you, and all those in whose hands it shall come, is the hearty desire of

Your loving and faithful pastor.

JOHN FLAVEL.

*From my study at Ley,  
Slapton, Oct. 7, 1667.*

## SAINT INDEED, &c.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.* - Prov. iv. 23.

THE heart of man is his worst part before it is regenerated, and the best afterward; it is the seat of principles, and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion, is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion, is to keep the heart with God. Here lies the very force and stress of religion ; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate of heaven a strait gate. Direction and help in this great work are the scope of the text: wherein we have,

I. An exhortation, *keep thy heart with all diligence.*

II. The reason or motive enforcing it, *for out of it are the issues of life.*

In the exhortation I shall consider,

1. The matter of the duty.
2. The manner of performing it.

1. The matter of the duty, *keep thy heart.* Heart is not here taken properly for the noble part of the body, which philosophers call the *primum vivens*, and *ultimum moriens*, the first that lives and the last that dies ; but by heart, in a metaphor, the Scripture sometimes represents some particular noble faculty of the soul. In *Rom.* i. 21, it is put for the understanding part ; their foolish heart, i. e. *their foolish understanding was darkened.* In *Psal.* cxix. 11, it is put for the

memory ; *thy word have I hid in my heart:* and in *1 John* iii.10, it is put for the conscience, which hath in it both the light of the understanding and the recognitions of the memory ; *if our heart condemn us, i.e. if our conscience,* whose proper office it is to condemn.

But in the text we are to take it more generally, for the whole soul, or inner man ; for what the heart is to the body, the soul is to the man ; and what health is to the heart, holiness is to the soul ; *quod sanit as in corpore, id sanctit as in corde.* The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigour of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

And by keeping the heart, understand the *diligent* and *\*constant* use of all holy means and duties to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God.

*Lavater* will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, beset by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within ; in which danger the soldiers, upon pain of death, are commanded to watch ; and though the expression, *keep thy heart,* seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it doth not imply a sufficiency in us to do it ; we are as able to stop the sun in its course, or to make the rivers run backward, as by our own will and power to rule and order our hearts ; we may as well be our own *saviours* as our own *keepers*; and yet *Solomon* speaks properly enough when he saith, *keep thy heart,* because the duty is ours, though the power be God's. A natural man hath no power, a gracious man hath some, though not sufficient ; and that power he hath depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ ; grace within us is beholden to grace without us, *John* xv. 5, '*Without me ye can do nothing.*' So much of the matter of the duty.

2. The manner of performing it is, *with all diligence.* The Hebrew is very emphatical ; *keep with all keeping* ; set double guards, your hearts will be gone else. And this vehemency of expression with which the duty is urged, plainly implies how difficult it is to keep our hearts, how dangerous to let them go.

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\* I say *constant*, for the reason added in the text extends the duty to all the states and conditions of a Christian's life, and makes it binding always. If the heart must be kept, because out of it are the issues of life, then as long as these issues of life do flow out of it, we are obliged to keep it.

3. The reason or motive quickening to this duty is very forcible and weighty, *for out of it are the issues of life*. That is, the heart is the source of all vital actions and operations ; it is the spring and original of both good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion. The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops ; what is in these came from thence; the hand and tongue always beginning where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute: *Luke vi. 46, A good man, out of the good treasury of his heart, bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasury of his heart bringeth forth evil things, for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaketh*. So then, if the heart err in its work, these must needs miscarry in theirs ; for heart errors are like the errors of the first concoction which cannot be rectified afterwards; or like the misplacing and inverting of the stamps and letters in the press, which must needs cause so many erratas in all the copies that are printed off. Oh ! then, how important a duty is that which is contained in the following proposition ?

*Doctrine. The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition, is one great business of a Christian's life.*

What the philosopher says of waters, is as properly applicable to hearts ; *it is hard to keep them within any bounds*; God hath set limits to them, yet how frequently do they transgress not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty; this is that which affords the Christian matter of labour, fear, and trembling, to his dying day. It is not the cleaning of the *hand* that *makes* a Christian, for many a hypocrite can shew as fair a hand as he, but the purifying watching, and right ordering of the *heart* ; this is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints, and costs so many deep groans and

brinish tears. It was the pride of *Hezekiah's* heart that made him lie in the dust, mourning before the Lord. *2 Chron. xxxii. 26*. It was the fear of hypocrisy invading the heart that made *David cry, let my heart be found in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed, Psal. cxix. 80*. It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God, that made him pour out that prayer, *Unite my heart to fear thy name*.

The method in which I propose to improve the proposition it this :

1. I shall inquire what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.
2. Assign divers reasons, why Christians must make this the great work and business of their lives.
3. Point at those seasons which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart.
4. Apply the whole in several uses.

*First.* What the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

To keep the heart, necessarily supposes a previous work of sanctification ; which hath set the heart right, by giving it a new spiritual bent and inclination, for as long as the heart it not *set right* by grace, as to in habitual frame, no duties or means can *keep it right* with God. Self is the poise of the unrenewed heart, which biases and moves it in all its designs and actions ; and as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God.

Man by creation was of one constant, uniform frame and tenor of spirit, held one straight and even course ; not one thought or faculty ravelled or disordered ; his mind had a perfect illumination to understand and know the will of God, and his will a perfect compliance therewith ; his sensitive appetite, and other inferior powers stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man, by degeneration is become a most disordered and rebellious creature, contesting with and opposing his Maker, as the *First Cause*, by self-dependence ; as the *Chiefest Good*, by self-love; as the *Highest Lord*, by self-will ; and as the *Last End*, by self-seeking, and so is quite disordered, and all his actions irregular. His illuminated understanding is clouded by ignorance, his complying will is full of

rebellion and stubbornness, and his subordinate power casting off the dominion and government of the superior faculties.

But by regeneration this disordered soul is set right again, sanctification being the rectifying and due framing ; or as the Scripture phrases it, the renovation of the soul after the image of God, *Eph. iv. 24* ; in which *self-dependence* is removed by faith ; *self-love*, by the love of God ; *self-will*, by subjection and obedience to the will of God ; and *self-seeking* by self-denial. The darkened understanding is again illuminated, *Eph. i. 18* ; the refractory will, sweetly subdued, *Psal. cx. 3* ; the rebellious appetite of concupiscence gradually conquered, *Rom. vi. 7*. And thus the soul which sin had universally depraved, is by grace restored and rectified.

This being pre-supposed, it will not be difficult to apprehend what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing else but *the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace hath reduced it, and daily strives to hold it*.

For though grace hath, in a great measure rectified the soul, and given it an habitual and heavenly temper ; yet sin often actually discomposes it again ; so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument, which though it be exactly tuned, a small matter brings it out of tune again ; yea, hang it aside but a little, and it will need setting again before you can play another lesson on it ; even so stands the case with gracious hearts ; if they are in frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead, and disordered when they come to another ; and therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart, *Job xi. 13, if thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him*. Well then, to keep the heart, is carefully to preserve it from sin which disorders it ; and maintain that spiritual frame which fits it for a life of communion with God ; and this includes these six acts in it.

1. Frequent observation of the frame of the heart, turning in and examining how the case stands with it ; this is one part of the work. Carnal and formal persons take no heed to this ; they cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts : there are some people who have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have had scarcely one hour's discourse with their own hearts all that while ; it is an hard thing to bring a man and himself together upon such an account ; but saints

know those soliloquies and self conferences to be of excellent use and advantage. The heathen could say, *the soul is made wise by sitting still in quietness* ; though bankrupts care not to look into their books of account, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward. *Psal. lxxvii. 6, I commune with mine own heart*. The heart can never be kept, until its case be examined and understood.

2. It includes deep humiliations for heart-evils and disorders ; thus *Hezekiah* humbled himself for the pride of his heart, *2 Chron. xxxii. 26*. Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer, in a sense of the plague of their own hearts, *1 Kings viii. 38*. Upon this account many an upright heart hath been laid low before God - *O what an heart have I ?* They have in their confession pointed at the heart, the pained place, *Lord, here is the wound, here is the plague sore* : it is with the heart well kept as it is with the eye ; if a small dust get into the eye, it will never leave twinkling and watering till it have wept it out. So the upright heart cannot be at rest till it have wept out its troubles, and poured out its complaints before the Lord.

3. It includes earnest supplications and instant prayer for heart-purifying and rectifying grace, when sin hath defiled and disordered it ; so *Psal. 1. 9, 12, 'Cleanse thou me from secret faults ; Unite my heart to fear thy name.'* Saints have always many such petitions depending before the Throne Grace ; this is the thing which is most pleaded by them with God ; when they are praying for outward mercies, haply their spirits may be more remiss ; but when it comes to the heart case, then they extend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with arguments, weep, and make supplication : *Oh for a better heart ! Oh for a heart to love God more ! to hate sin more, to walk more closely with God. Lord deny not to me such a heart, whatever thou deny me ; give me a heart to fear, love, and delight in thee, if I beg my bread in desolate places*. It has been observed of holy Mr. Bradford, that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin ; and when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit till he had obtained some relish of that mercy, which is third thing included in keeping the heart.

4. It includes the imposing of strong engagements upon ourselves to walk more carefully with God, and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin. Well composed, advised, and deliberate vows, are in some cases of excellent use to guard the heart against some special sin ; so *Job xxxi. 1, I made a covenant with mine eyes*. By this means holy ones have over-awed their souls, and preserved themselves from defilement by some special heart defilement.

5. It includes a constant, holy jealousy over our own hearts; quick-sighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin. He that will keep his heart, must have the eyes of the soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections; if the affections break loose, and the passions be stirred, the soul must discover and suppress them before they get to a height - *O my soul, dost thou well in this ? My tumultuous thoughts and passions, where is your commission ?*

Happy is the man that thus feareth always, *Prov. xxviii. 14*. By this fear of the Lord it is that men depart from evil, shake off security and preserve themselves from iniquity. He that will keep his heart must feed with fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his sojourning here in fear ; and all this is little enough to keep the heart from sin.

6. And lastly, to add more, it includes the realizing of God's presence with us, and setting the Lord always before us; this the people of God have found a singular means to keep their hearts upright, and awe them from sin. When the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity. Holy *Job* durst not suffer his heart to yield to an impure, vain thought, and what was it that moved him to so great a circumspection ? Why, he tells you, *Job xxxi. 4, Doth not He see my ways, and count all my steps ? Walk before me* (saith God to Abraham) *and be thou perfect, Gen. xvii. 1*. Even as parents use to set their children in the congregation before them, knowing that else they will be joying and playing ; so would the heart of the best man too, were it not for the eye of God.

In these and such-like particulars gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts ; and they are as careful to prevent the breaking loose of their corruptions in times of temptation, as seamen are to bind fast their guns, to preserve them in a storm ; as careful to preserve the sweetness and comfort they have got from God in any duty, as one that comes out of a hot bath, or a great sweat, is of taking cold, by going forth into the cold air. This is the work, and of all works in religion it is the *most difficult, constant, and important* work.

(1). *It is the hardest work*. Heart-work is hard work indeed; to shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains ; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him, will cost thee something ; to attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy, but to get thy heart broken for sin, whilst thou art confessing it ; melted with free grace while thou art blessing God for it ; to be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame, not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pains of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external part of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter, for even carnal persons, by the force of common principles, can do this ; but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up an holy government over thy thought, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is not easy.

(2). *It is a constant work*. The keeping of the heart is such a work as is never done till life be done ; this labor and life end together. It is with a Christian in this business as it is with a seaman, when a vessel has sprung a leak at sea ; if they tug not constantly at the pump, the water will increase upon them, and will quickly sink them. It is in vain for them to say the work is hard, and we are weary: there is no time or condition in the life of a Christian which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in keeping up of Moses' hands, while Israel and Amalek were fighting below, *Exodus xvii. 12*, No sooner did the hands of Moses grow heavy and sink down, than Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch



over their own hearts for but a few minutes.

(3). *It is the most important business of a Christian's life.* Without this we are but formalists in religion ; all our professions, gifts, and duties signify nothing : *My son, give me thine heart, Prov. xviii. 26.* God is pleased to call that a gift, which is indeed a debt ; he will put this honor upon the creature to receive it from him in the way of a gift ; but if this be not given him, he regards not whatever else you bring to him : there is so much only of worth and value in what we do, as there is of heart in it. Concerning the heart, God seems to say, as Joseph of Benjamin, - *If you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face.* - Among the Heathen, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart; and if that was unsound and naught, the sacrifice was rejected. God rejects all duties (how glorious soever in other respects) offered him without the heart. He that performs duty without a heart, viz. heedlessly, is no more accepted with God than he who performs it with a double heart, viz. hypocritically, *Isa. lxvi. 3.* And thus I have briefly opened the nature of this duty, which is imparted in the phrase, *keep thy heart.* I proceed,

2. Next, I shall give you some rational account why Christians should make this the great business of their lives, to keep their hearts.

The importance and necessity of making this our great and main business will manifestly appear in that, 1). The honor of God ; 2). The sincerity of our profession ; 3). The beauty of our conversation; 4). The comfort of our souls ; 5). The improvement of our graces ; and 6). Our ability in the hour of temptation, are all wrapt up in, and dependent on, our sincerity and care in the management of this work.

1). The glory of God is much concerned therein. Heart evils are very provoking evils to the Lord. The schools do well observe, that outward sins are *sins of greater infamy*, but heart sins are *sins of deeper guilt*. How severely hath the great God declared his wrath from heaven against heart wickedness ? The great crime for which the old world stands indicted, *Gen. v. 6, 7*, is heart wickedness ; *God saw that every imagination (or fiction) of their hearts was only evil, and that continually ;* for which he sent the dreadfulest judgment that was ever executed since the world began. *And the Lord said, I will destroy man*

*whom I have created, from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping things, and the fowls of heaven, for it repenteth me that I have made man, ver. 7.* We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies, (though they were defiled with these) particularly alledged against them ; but the evils of their hearts; yea, that which God was so provoked by, as to give up his peculiar inheritance into the enemies' hands, was the evil of their hearts. *O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved ; how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee !* The wickedness and vanity of their thoughts God took particular notice of; and because of this the *Chaldeans* must come upon them, *as a lion from his thicket, and tear them to pieces.* For the sin of thoughts it was that God threw down the fallen angels from heaven, and still keeps them in *everlasting chains* to the judgment to which they are reserved ; by which expression is not obscurely intimated some extraordinary judgment to which they are reserved ; as prisoners that have most irons laid upon them may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors ; and what was their sin ? Why only spiritual wickedness; for they having no bodily organs, could act nothing externally against God. Yea, mere heart evils are so provoking, that for them he rejects with indignation all the duties that some men perform unto him, *Isa. lvi. 3*, *'He that killeth an ox, as if he slew a man, he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck, he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood, he that burneth incense, as he that blesseth an idol.* In what words could the abhorrence of creature's actions be more fully expressed by the holy God ? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account, than their sacrifices, though *materially* such as himself appointed : and what made them so ? the following words inform us, *their soul delighteth in abominations.*

To conclude, such is the vileness of mere heart sins, that the scripture sometimes intimates the difficulty of pardon for them. So in the case of *Simon Magus, Acts viii. 21.* His heart was not right, he had vile thoughts of God, and the things of God : the apostle bids him *repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart be forgiven him.* O then, never slight heart evils ; for by these God is highly wronged and provoked, and for this reason let every Christian make it his work to keep his heart with all diligence.

2). The sincerity of our profession much depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts ; for it is most certain, that a man is but a hypocrite in his profession, however eminent he be in the externals of religion, that is heedless and careless of the frame of his heart ; you have a pregnant instance of this in the history of *Jehu*, *2 Kings* x. 39, *But Jehu took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with his heart.* That context gives us an account of the great service performed by Jehu against the house of Ahab and Baal, as also of a great temporal reward given him by God for that service, even that his children to the fourth generation should sit upon the throne of Israel. And yet in these words Jehu is censured for a hypocrite ; though God approved and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person that did it, as hypocritical ; and wherein lay his hypocrisy ? But in this, that he took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord with his heart, (i.e.) he did all insincerely and for self-ends ; and though the works he did were *materially* good, yet he, not purging his heart from those unworthy self designs in doing it, was a hypocrite : and Simon of whom we spake before, though he appeared such a person that the apostle could not regularly refuse him, yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered ; and what discovered it but this ; that though he professed and associated himself with the saints, he was a stranger to the mortification of heart sins : *Thy heart is not right with God, Acts* viii. 21. - It is true, there is great difference among Christians themselves, in their diligence and dexterity about heart-work ; some are more conversant and successful in it than others are ; but he that takes no heed to his heart, he that is not *careful* to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite, *Ezek.* xxxiii. 31, 32. *And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and sit before thee [as my people] and they hear thy words, but they will not do them ; for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.* Here were a company of formal hypocrites, as it is evident from that expression, *as my people*, like them but not of them ; and what made them so ? their outside was fair ; here were reverent postures, high professions, much seeming delight in ordinances ; *thou art to them as a lovely song* ; but for all that, they kept not their hearts with God in those duties, their hearts were commanded by their lusts, they went after their covetousness ; had they kept their hearts with God, all had

been well, but not regarding which way their heart went in duty, there lay the coal of their hypocrisy.

*Objection.* If any upright soul should hence infer, *then I am an hypocrite too, for many times my heart departs from God in duty, do what I can, yet I cannot hold it close with God.*

*Solution.* To this I answer, the very objection carries in it its own solution : thou sayest, *Do what I can, yet I cannot keep my heart with God.* Soul, if thou dost what thou canst, thou hast the blessing of an upright, though God sees good to exercise thee under the affliction of a discomposed heart. There still remains some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best to humble them ; but if you find a care before to prevent them, and opposition against them when they come, grief and sorrow afterward, you will find enough to clear you from reigning hypocrisy.

(1). This fore-care is seen partly in laying up the word in thine heart to prevent them, *Psal.* cxix. 11, *thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* Partly in your endeavors to engage your heart to God, *Jer.* xxx. 21, and partly in begging preventing grace from God in your onsets of duty, *Psal.* cxvi. 36, 37. It is a good sign where this care goes before a duty.

(2). And it is a sweet sign to uprightness to oppose them in their first rise, *Psal.* cxix. 113, *I hate vain thoughts,* *Gal.* v. 17, *The Spirit lusteth against the flesh.*

(3). Thy after-grief discovers thy upright heart ; if with Hezekiah thou art humbled for the evils of thy heart, thou hast no reason from those disorders to question the integrity of it ; but to suffer sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let thy heart habitually and uncontrolledly wander from God, is a sad a dangerous symptom indeed.

3). The beauty of our conversation arises from the heavenly frames, and holy order of our spirits ; there is a spiritual lustre and beauty in the conversation of saints ; *the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour*, they shine as the lights of the world ; but whatever lustre and beauty is in their lives, comes from the excellency of their spirits ; as the candle within puts lustre upon the lanthorn in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should

ever produce well ordered conversation ; and since, (as the text observes), the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart as their fountain, it must follow, that such as the heart is, the life will be : hence *1 Pet. ii. 12, Abstain from fleshly lusts - having your conversation honest, or beautiful*, as the Greek word imports. So *Isa. lv. 7, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. His way*, notes the course of his life; *his thoughts*, the frame of his heart ; and therefore since the way, or course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart, both or neither will be forsaken ; the heart is the womb of all actions ; these actions are virtually and feminally contained in our thoughts, these thoughts being once made up into affections, are quickly made out into suitable actions and practices. If the heart be wicked, then, as Christ saith, *Matt. xv. 19, Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, &c.* Mark the order, first wanton or revengeful thoughts, then unclean or murderous practices.

And if the heart be holy and spiritual, as David speaks from sweet experience, in *Psal. xlv. 1, My heart is [inditing] a good matter; I speak of the things which [I have made,] touching the king ; my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.* Here is a life richly beautified with good works ; some ready made ; *I will speak of the things which I have made* ; others upon the wheel making ; *my heart is inditing*, but both proceeding from the heavenly frame of his heart.

Put the heart in frame, and the life will quickly discover that it is so. It think it is not very difficult to discern by the duties and converses of Christians, what frames their spirits are under ; take a Christian in a good frame, and how serious, and how heavenly and profitable will his converses and duties be ! What a lovely companion is he, during the continuance of it. It would do any one's heart good to be with him at such a time. *Psal. xxxvii. 30, 31, The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment ; the law of his God is in his heart.*

When the heart is up with God, and full of God, how dextrously and ingeniously will he wind in spiritual discourse, improving every occasion, and advantage to some heavenly purpose ? Few words then run at the waste spout.

And what else can be the reason, why the discourses and duties of many Christians are become so frothy and unprofitable and their communion both with God, and one another becomes as a dry stalk, but because their hearts are neglected ? Surely this must be the reason of it, and verily it is an evil to be bewailed ; for as by this, Christian fellowship is become a sapless thing, so the attracting beauty that was wont to shine from the conversation of the saints upon the faces and consciences of the world, (which, if it did not allure and bring them in love with the ways of God, yet at least left a testimony in their consciences of the excellency of those men and their ways), this is in a great measure lost, to the unspeakable detriment of religion.

Time was, when Christians conducted in such a manner that the world stood gazing at them ; their life and language were of a different strain from others - their tongues discovered them to be Galileans wherever they came ; but now, since vain speculations, and fruitful controversies have so much obtained possession of, and heart-work, or practical godliness has been so much neglected by professors, the case is sadly altered, their discourse is become like other men's discourse. If they come among you now, they may *hear every man speak in his own language, Acts ii. 6.* And truly I have little hope to see this evil redressed, and the credit of religion again repaired, till Christians do their old work, till they ply heart-work closer. When the salt of heavenly-mindedness is cast into the spring, the streams will run clearer and sweeter.

4). The comfort of our souls doth much depend upon the keeping of our hearts ; for he that is negligent, in attending to his own heart, is, ordinarily, a great stranger to assurance, and the comforts flowing from it.

Indeed if the Antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your condition, telling you that it is only the Spirit that immediately assures you, by witnessing your adoption directly, without them; then you might be careless of your hearts, yea, strangers to them, and yet no strangers to comfort : but since both scripture and experience confute this dotage, I hope you will never look for comfort in this unscriptural way. I deny not but it is the work and office of the Spirit to assure you, yet do I confidently

affirm, that if ever you obtain assurance in the ordinary way wherein God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own hearts ; you may expect your comforts upon easier terms ; but I am mistaken if ever you enjoy them upon any other - *Give all diligence - prove yourselves* - is a scripture direction.

Mr. Roberts, in his Treatise of the Covenant, tells us, that he knew a Christian, who in the infancy of his Christianity, so vehemently panted after the infallible assurance of God's love, that for a long time together he earnestly desired some voice from heaven; yea, sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees and stones ; this, was denied him ; but in time a better was afforded, in the ordinary way of searching the word, and his own heart. An instance of the like nature the learned Gerson gives us, of one that was driven by temptation upon the very borders of desperation ; at last, being sweetly settled and assured, one asked him how he attained it ; he answered, not by any extraordinary revelation, but by subjecting his understanding to the Scriptures, and comparing his own heart with them. The Spirit, indeed, assures by witnessing our adoption ; and he witnesseth in two ways.

*First - Objectively*, by working those graces in our souls which are the conditions of the promise, and so the Spirit and his graces in us, are all one: the Spirit of God dwelling in us, is a mark of our adoption. Now the Spirit cannot be discerned in his essence, but in his operations ; and how to discern these without serious searching, and diligently watching the heart, I cannot imagine.

*Second - Effectively*, by irradiating the soul with a grace - discovering light, shining upon his own work; which, in order of nature, follows the former work ; he first infuses his grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it. Now, since the heart is the subject of that infused grace, even this way of the Spirit's witnessing includes the necessity of keeping carefully our own heart ; For,

1. A neglected heart is so confused and dark, that the little grace which is in it, is not ordinarily discernible : the most accurate and laborious Christians, that take most pains, and spend most time about their hearts, do yet find it difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit there ; how then shall the Christian which is, (comparatively), negligent and remiss about heart-work be ever able to

discover grace ? Sincerity, which is the thing sought for, lies in the heart, like a small piece of gold on the bottom of a river ; he that will find it must stay till the water be clear and settled, and he shall see it sparkling at the bottom ; and that the heart may be clear and settled, how much pains and watching, care and diligence, will it cost?

2. God doth not usually indulge lazy and negligent souls with the comforts of assurance, he will not so much as seem to patronize sloth and carelessness, he will give it, but it shall be in his own way: his command hath united our care and comfort together ; they are mistaken that think the beautiful child of assurance may be born without pangs : ah, How many solitary hours have the people of God spent in their heart examination ? how many times have they looked into the word, and then into their hearts ? sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity and were even ready to draw forth the triumphant conclusion of assurance ; then comes a doubt they cannot resolve, and dashes all again ; many hopes and fears, doubtings and reasonings, they have had in their own breasts, before they arrived at a comfortable settlement.

To conclude, suppose it possible for a careless Christian to attain assurance, yet it is impossible he should long retain it; for it is with those whose hearts are big with the joys of assurance, as with a woman subject to miscarriages ; if extraordinary care be not used, it is a thousand to one if she ever embrace a living child : so it is here, a little pride, vanity, carelessness, dashes all that for which thou hast been labouring a long time in many a weary duty. Since then the joy of our life, the comfort of our souls, rises and falls with our diligence in this work, keep your heart with all diligence.

5). The improvement of our graces depends on the keeping of our hearts ; I never knew grace to thrive in a negligent soul ; the habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart ; and the deeper they are radicated there, the more flourishing grace is. In *Eph.* iii. 17, we read of *being rooted in grace* : grace in the heart is the root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand, *Psal.* cxvi 10, 2 *Cor.* iv. 13. Christ is the root of a Christian ; and according, as this thrives under divine influences, so the acts of grace are more or less fruitful or vigorous : now in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fructifying influences are stopt and cut off; multitudes

of vanities break in upon it, and devour its strength ; the heart is, as it were, the pasture, in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day ; a gracious heart diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day, *Psal. cxxxix. 17. How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God ! How great is the sum of them ? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand ; and when I awake, I am still with thee.* And as the gracious heart feeds and nourishes them, so they refresh and feed the heart, *Psal. lxxiii. 5, 6. My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness, while I think upon thee, &c.* But in the disregarded heart, swarms of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and jostle out those spiritual ideas and thoughts of God by which the soul should be refreshed.

Besides, the careless heart makes nothing out of any duty or ordinance it performs or attends on, and yet these are the conduits of heaven, from whence grace is watered and made fruitful ; a man may go with an heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never be improved by them ; for heart-neglect is a leak in the bottom ; no heavenly influences, however rich, abide in that soul, *Mat. xii. 3, 4.* The heart that lay open and common, like the highway, free for all passengers, when the seed fell on it, the fowls came and devoured it. Alas ! it is not enough to hear, unless we watch unto prayer. In a word, all ordinances, means, and duties, are blessed improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them.

6). The stability of our souls in the hour of temptation will be much according to the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts ; the careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation ; his principal batteries are raised against the heart ; if he wins that he wins all, for it commands the whole man ; and, alas ! how easy a conquest is a neglected heart ; it is no more difficult to surprise it, than for an enemy to enter a city, whose gates are open and unguarded ; it is the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength. Divines observe this to be the method in which temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength.

(1) The irritation of the object, or that power it hath to work

upon, and provoke our corrupt nature, which is either done by the real presence of the object, or else by speculation when the object (though absent) is held out by the imagination before the soul.

(2) Then follows the motion of the sensitive appetite, which is stirred and provoked by the imagination, representing it as a sensual good, as having pleasure in it..

(3) Then there is a consultation in the mind about it, deliberating about the likeliest means of accomplishing it.

(4) Next follows the election, or choice of the will.

(5) And lastly, the desire, or full engagement of the will to it ; all this may be done in a few minutes, for the debates of the soul are quick and soon ended. When it comes thus far, the heart is won, Satan has entered victoriously, and displayed his colours upon the walls of that royal fort ; but had the heart been well guarded at first, it had never come to this height ; the temptation had been stopped in the first or second act ; and indeed there it is stopt easily ; for it is in the motion of a tempted soul to sin, as in the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill ; it is easily stopped at first, but when once well a going *it acquires strength by descending*, and is hard to stop its course till it reaches the bottom : therefore it is the greatest wisdom in the world to observe the first motions of the heart, to check and stop sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at first ; a little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now, which the careless heart not heeding, is brought within the power of temptation ; as the Syrians were brought blindfold into the midst of Samaria, before they knew where they were.

By this time, reader, I hope that thou art fully satisfied how consequential a work the keeping of thy heart is, it being a duty that wraps up so many dear interests of the soul in it.

*Thirdly*, according to the method propounded, I proceed to point out those special seasons in the life of a Christian, which require and call for our utmost diligence in keeping the heart : for though (as was observed before) the duty always binds *ad semper*, and there be no time or condition of life in which we may be excused from this work, yet there are some *signal seasons, critical hours*, requiring more than common vigilance over the heart.

*1<sup>st</sup> Season.* The first season is the time of prosperity, when Providence smiles upon us, and dandles us upon her knee. Now Christian, keep thy heart with all diligence ; for now for now it will be exceeding apt to grow secure, proud and earthly : (says Bernard) *to see a man humble in prosperity, is one of the greatest rarities in the world.* Even a good Hezekiah could not hide a vain-glorious temper under his temptation ; and hence that caution to Israel, Deut. vi. 10, 11, 12. *And it shall be when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware to thy fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildest not, and houses full of all good things which thou filledst not, &c. then beware lest thou forget the Lord, and indeed so it fell out, for Jesurun waxed fat and kicked, Deut. xxxi. 15.*

Now then, the first case will be this, viz.

*1<sup>st</sup> Case.* How a Christian may keep his heart from pride and carnal security, under the smiles of Providence. and the confluence of creature comforts ?

There are seven choice helps to secure the heart from the dangerous snares of prosperity ; the first is this.

*1<sup>st</sup> Help.* To consider the dangerous ensnaring temptations attending a pleasant and prosperous condition ; few, yea, very few of those that live in the pleasures and prosperity of this world, escape everlasting perdition, Matt. xxix. 24. *It is easier, (saith Christ) for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven :* and 1 Cor. i. 26, *Not many mighty, not many noble are called.* It might justly make us tremble, when the Scripture tells us in general, that few shall be saved ; much more when it tells us, that of the rank and sort of which we are, but few shall be saved. When Joshua called all the tribes of Israel to lot upon them for the discovery of Achan, doubtless Achan feared ; when the tribe of Judah was taken, his fear increased ; but when the family of the Zarhites was taken, it was time then to tremble. So when the Scriptures come so near as to tell us that of such a sort of men very few shall escape, it is time to look about ; “*I should wonder,*” saith Chrysostom, “*if any of the rulers be saved.*” Oh how many have been coached to hell in the chariots of earthly pleasures, whilst others have been whipt

to heaven by the rod of affliction ? How few, like the daughters of Tyre, come to Christ with a gift ! How few among the rich entreat his favor!

*2<sup>nd</sup> Help.* It may keep us more humble and watchful in prosperity, if we consider that among Christians many have been much the worse for it. How good had it been for some of them, if they had never known prosperity ; when they were in a low condition, how humble, spiritual and heavenly were they, but when advanced, what an apparent alteration hath been upon their spirits ; it was so with Israel when they were in a low condition in the wilderness ; then Israel was holiness to the Lord, Jer. ii. 23. But when they came into Canaan, and were fed in a fat pasture, then, *We are lords, we will come no more unto thee,* ver. 31. Outward gains are ordinarily attended with inward losses, as in a low condition, their civil employments were wont to have a tang and savour of their religious duties, so in an exalted condition their duties commonly have a savour of the world. He indeed is rich in grace, whose graces are not hindered by his riches ; there are but few Jehosaphats in the world, of whom it is said, 2 Chron. xvii. 5,6, *He had silver and gold in abundance, and his heart was lifted up in the way of God's commands.* Will not this keep thy heart humble in prosperity, to think how dearly many godly men have paid for their riches ; that through them they have lost that which all the world cannot purchase ; then in the next place.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Help.* Keep down thy vain heart by the consideration, that God values no man a jot more for these things. God values no man by outward excellencies, but by inward graces ; they are the internal ornaments of the Spirit, which are of great price in God's eyes, 1 Pet. iii. 4, *He despises all worldly glory, and accepts no man's person, but in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him,* Acts x. 35. Indeed, if the judgment of God went by the same rule that man's doth, we might value ourselves by these things, and stand upon them. But as one said (when dying) I shall not appear before God as a doctor, but as a man ; and so much every man is, and no more, as he is in the judgment of God. Doth thy heart yet swell ? And will neither of the former considerations keep it humble?

4<sup>th</sup> Help. Then fourthly, consider *how bitterly many dying persons have bewailed their folly when they came to die, that ever they set their hearts upon these things, and heartily wished that they had never known them.* What a sad story was that of Pius Quintus, who dying cried out despairingly, *When I was in a low condition, I had some hopes of salvation, but when I was advanced to be a cardinal, I greatly doubted it, but since I came to the Popedom, I have no hope at all.* Mr. Spencer also tells us a real, but sad story of a rich oppressor, who had scraped up a great estate for his only son ; so when he came to die he called his son to him, and said, ‘*Son, do you indeed love me ?*’ The son answered, that nature, besides his paternal indulgence, obliged him to that : ‘*Then,*’ said the father, ‘*express it by this: hold thy finger in the candle as long as I am saying a Pater Noster ;*’ The son attempted, but could not endure it; upon that the father broke out into these expressions, ‘*Thou canst not suffer the burning of thy finger for me, but to get this wealth, I have hazarded my soul for thee, and must burn body and soul in hell, for thysake ; thy pains would have been but for a moment, but mine will be unquenchable fire.*’

5<sup>th</sup> Help. The heart may be kept humble, by considering *of what a clogging nature earthly things are to a soul heartily engaged in the way of heaven ;* they shut out much of heaven from us at present, though they may not shut us out of heaven at last. If thou consider thyself under the notion of a stranger in this world, travelling for heaven, and seeking a better country, thou hast then as much reason to be taken and delighted with these things, as a weary horse hath with a heavy cloak-bag. There was a serious truth in that atheistic scoff of Julian, when taking away the Christians' estates, and told them *it was to make them more fit for the kingdom of heaven.*

6<sup>th</sup> Help. Is thy spirit, for all this, flatulent and lofty ? ; then urge upon it *the consideration of that awful day of reckoning, wherein, according to our receipts of mercies shall be our account for them.* Methinks this should awe and humble the vainest heart that ever was in the breast of man. Know for a certainty, that the Lord records all the mercies that ever he gave thee, from the beginning to the end of thy life, see Micah vi. 4, *Remember, O my people, from Shittim unto*

*Gilgal, &c.* Yes, they are exactly numbered and recorded in order to an account; and thy account will be suitable, Luke xii. 48, *To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.* You are but stewards, and your Lord will come and take an account of you; and what a great account have you to make who have much of this world in your hands ? What swift witnesses will your mercies be against you, if this be the best fruit of them ?

7<sup>th</sup> Help. It is a very humbling consideration, *that the mercies of God should work otherwise upon my spirit than they used to do upon the spirits of others, to whom they came as sanctified mercies from the love of God.* Ah, Lord ! What a sad consideration is this ? Enough to lay me in the dust ; when I consider,

(1.) That their mercies have greatly humbled them ; the higher God hath raised them, the lower they have laid themselves before God. Thus did Jacob when God had given him much substance, Gen. xxxii. 5, 10. ‘*And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and all the truth which thou hast showed thy servant ; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and am now become two bands.*’ And thus it was with holy David, 2 Sam. vii. 13, When God had confirmed the promise to him, to build him an house, and not reject him as he did Saul, he goes in before the Lord and saith, ‘*Who am I, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ?*’ So indeed God required, Deut. xxvi. 5. When Israel was to bring to God the first fruits of Canaan, they were to say, ‘*A Syrian ready to perish was my father &c.*’ Do others raise God the higher for his raising them ? And the more God raises me, the more shall I abuse him and exalt myself ? O, what a sad thing is this !

(2.) Others have freely ascribed the glory of all their enjoyments to God, and magnified not themselves, but him, for their mercies : So David, 2 Sam. vii. 26, *Let thy name be magnified, and the house of thy servant be established.* He does not fly upon the mercy, and suck out the sweetness of it, looking no further than his own comforts ; no, he cares for no mercy except God be magnified in it. So Psal. xviii. 2, when God had delivered him from all his enemies, ‘*The Lord,*’ (saith he) ‘*is my strength and my rock, he is become my salvation.*’ They did not put the crown upon their own heads as I do by my vanity.

(3.) The mercies of God have been melting mercies unto others, melting their souls in love to the God of their mercies. So Hannah, *1 Sam.* ii. 1, when she received the mercy of a son, *'My soul'* (saith she) *'rejoiceth in the Lord'* not in the mercy, but in the God of the mercy : And so Mary, *Luke* i. 46, *My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit rejoiceth in my God my Saviour.* The word signifies, to make more room for God ; their hearts were not contracted, but the more enlarged to God.

(4.) The mercies of God have been great restraints to keep others from sin. So *Ezra* ix. 13, *'Seeing thou our God, hast given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments?'* Ingenuous souls have felt the force of the obligations of love and mercy upon them.

(5.) To conclude, the mercies of God to others, have been as oil to the wheels of their obedience, and made them fitter for service, *2 Chron.* xvii. 5. Now if mercies work contrarily upon my heart, what cause have I to be afraid that they come not to me in love ? I tell you this is enough to damp the spirit of any saint, to see what sweet effects mercies have had on others, and what sad effects upon him.

*2nd Season.* The *second special season* in the life of a Christian, requiring more than a common diligence to keep his heart, is *the time of adversity* ; when Providence frowns upon you, and blasts your outward comforts, then look to your hearts ; keep them with all diligence from repining against God, or fainting under his hand; for troubles, though sanctified, are troubles still; even holy sweet-briar, and thistles have their prickles. Jonah was a good man, and yet how fretful was his heart under affliction ; Job was the mirror of patience, yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble ? You will find it as hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions, as it is to fix quick-silver. Oh, the hurries and tumults which they make in the best hearts ? The second case will be this.

*2nd Case.* *How a Christian under great afflictions may keep his heart from repining or desponding under the hand of God.* Now there are nine special helps I shall here offer to keep thy heart in this condition ; and the first shall be this, to work upon your hearts this great truth.

*1<sup>st</sup> Help.* That by these cross providences, God is faithfully pursuing the great design of electing love upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end.

Afflictions fall not out by casualty, but by counsel, *Job* v. 6, *Eph.* i. 11, by this counsel of God they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to saints, *Isa.* xxvii. 9, *By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged,* etc. *'But he for our profit,'* &c. *Heb.* xii. 10, *'but he for our profit,'* &c. *Rom.* viii. 28, *'All things work together for good;'* they are God's workmen upon our hearts, to pull down the pride and carnal security of them ; and being so, their nature is changed ; they are turned into blessings and benefits *Psal.* cix 71, *'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.'* And sure then, thou hast no reason to quarrel with, but rather to admire that God should concern himself so much in thy good, to use any means for the accomplishing of it, *Philip.* iii. 11. *Paul could bless God if by any means he might attain the resurrection of the dead.* *'My brethren,'* (saith James) *'count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.'* *Jam.* ii. 3. My Father is about a design of love upon my soul, and do I well to be angry with him ? All that he doth is in pursuance of, and in reference to some eternal, glorious ends upon my soul. O it is my ignorance of God's design that makes me quarrel with him ! He saith to thee in this case, as to Peter, *'What I do, thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know it.'*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Help.* Though God has reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people, yet he has tied up his own hands by promise never to take away his loving kindness from them. Can I look that Scripture in the face with a repining, discontented spirit, *2 Sam.* vii. 14. *'I will be his Father, and he shall be my son ; if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men ; nevertheless my mercy shall not depart away from him.'* O my heart, my haughty heart, dost thou well to be dis-contented, when God hath given thee the whole tree, with all the clusters of comfort growing on it ; because he suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves ? Christians have two sorts of goods, the goods of the throne, and the goods of the footstool ; immovables and move-ables; if God has secured these, never let my heart be troubled at the loss of those. Indeed, if he had cut off his love, or discovenanted my soul, I had



reason to be cast down ; but this he hath not, he cannot do it

*3<sup>d</sup> Help.* It is of marvellous efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under affliction, *‘to call to mind, that thine own Father has the ordering of them ;’* not a creature moves hand or tongue against thee, but by this permission. Suppose the cup be a bitter cup, yet it is the cup which thy Father hath given thee to drink, and canst thou suspect poison to be in that cup which he delivers thee ? Foolish man, put home the case to thine own heart, consult thine own bowels ; canst thou find in thy heart to give thy child that which would hurt and undo him ? No ! Thou wouldst as soon hurt thyself as him.

If thou then, being evil, knowest how to give good gifts to thy children, *‘how much more doth God, Mat. vii. 11 !’* The very consideration of his nature, a God of love, of pity, and tender mercies, or of his relation to thee, as a father, husband, friend, might be security enough, if he had not spoken a word to quiet thee in this case ; and yet you have his word too, *Jer. xxv. 6*, by the prophet Jeremiah: *‘I will do you no hurt.’* You lie too near his heart for him to hurt you ; nothing grieves him more than your groundless and unworthy suspicions of his designs do ; would it not grieve a faithful, tender-hearted physician, when he hath studied the case of his patient, prepared the most excellent receipts to save his life, to hear him cry out, *“O, he hath undone me, he hath poisoned me ?”* because it gripes and pains him in the operation ; O, when will you be ingenuous !

*4<sup>th</sup> Help.* *‘God respects you as much in a low as in a high condition; and therefore it need not so much trouble you to be made low ;’* nay, to speak home, he manifests more of his love, grace, and tenderness, in the time of affliction than prosperity; as God did not at first choose you because you were high, so he will not now forsake you because you are low : men may look shy upon you, and alter their respects as your condition is altered ; when providences hath blasted your estate, your summer friends may grow strange, as fearing you may be troublesome to them ; but will God do so ? No, no, *‘I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,’ Heb. xxiii. 5.* Indeed if adversity and poverty should bar you from access to God, it were a sad condition ; but, you may go to God as freely as ever ; *‘My God (saith the church)*

*will hear me, Mic. vii.* Poor David, when stript of all earthly comforts, could encourage himself in the Lord his God, and why cannot you ? Suppose your husband or son had lost all at sea, and should come to you in rags, could you deny the relation ? or refuse to entertain him ? If you would not, much less will God : why then are you so troubled? Though your condition be changed, your Father's love and respects are not changed.

*5<sup>th</sup> Help.* And if by the loss of outward comforts, God preserves your souls from the ruining power of temptation, you have little cause to sink your hearts by such sad thoughts about them. Are not these earthly enjoyments, the things that make men shrink in times of trial; for the love of these many have forsaken Christ in such an hour, *Mat. xix. 22.* The young ruler *‘went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions :’* and if this be God's design, what have I done in quarrelling with him about it ? We see mariners in a storm can throw overboard rich bales of silk, and precious things, to preserve their lives and the vessel, and we know it is usual for soldiers in a city besieged, to destroy the fairest buildings without the walls, in which the enemy may take shelter, and no man doubts but it is wisely done; and such as have gangreened legs or arms, can willingly stretch them out to be cut off, and not only thank, but pay the surgeon for his pains ; and must God only be repined against for casting over what would sink you in a storm ? for pulling down what would shelter your enemy in the siege of temptation ? for cutting off what would endanger your everlasting life ? O, inconsiderate, ungrateful man ! Are not these things for which thou grieveest, the very things which have ruined thousands of souls ? Well, what Christ doth in this, thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou mayest.

*6<sup>th</sup> Help.* It would much stay the heart under adversity to consider *‘that God by such humbling providences, may be accomplishing that for which you have long prayed and waited:’* and should you be troubled at that ? Say, Christian, hast thou not many prayers depending before God upon such accounts as these, that he would keep thee from sin ; discover to thee the emptiness of the creature ; that he would mortify and kill thy lusts, that thy heart may

never find rest in any enjoyment but Christ ? By such humbling and impoverishing strokes God may be fulfilling thy desire. Lo, *'he hath hedged up thy way with thorns :'* and wouldst thou see the creature's vanity ? Thy affliction is a fair glass to discover it, for the vanity of the creature is never so effectually and sensibly discovered, as in our own experience of it.

Wouldst thou have thy corruptions mortified ? This is the way. Now God takes away the food and fuel that maintained them ; for as prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. Wouldst thou have thy heart rest nowhere but in the bosom of God ? What better way canst thou imagine Providence should take to accomplish thy desire, than by pulling from under thy head that soft pillow of creature delights on which you rested before ? And yet you fret at this ; peevish child, how dost thou exercise thy Father's patience ? If he delay to answer thy prayers, thou art ready to say, *"he regards me not ;"* if he do that which really answers the scope and main end of them, but not in the way thou expected, you quarrelled with him for that, as if instead of answering, he were crossing all thy hopes and aim : is this ingenuous ? Is it not enough that God is so gracious to do what thou desirest, but thou must be so impudent to expect he should do it in the way which thou prescribed ?

*7<sup>th</sup> Help.* Again it may stay thy heart, if thou consider, that in these troubles God is about that work, which if thou didst see the design of it, thy soul would rejoice. We poor creatures are blinded with much ignorance, and are not able to discern how particular providences towards God's end ; and therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, are often murmuring because Providence leads us about in a howling desert, where we are exposed to straits, though yet, then he led them, and is now leading us, *by the right way to a city of habitations.* If you could but see how God in his secret counsel laid the whole plot and design of thy salvation, even to the smallest means and circumstances, this way, and by these means, such an one shall be saved, and by no other ; such a number of afflictions I appoint for this man, at this time, and in this order ; they shall befall him thus, and thus they shall work for him ; could you, I say, but discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations to each other,

together with the general respect and influence they all have unto the last end ; of all the conditions in the world, you would choose that in which you now are, had you liberty to make your own choice. Providence is like a curious piece of Arras made up of a thousand shreds ; which single, we know not what to make of, but put together and stitched up orderly, they represent a beautiful history to the eye. As God works all things according to the counsel of his own will, as the best way to bring about thy salvation ; such an one has a proud heart, so many humbling providences I appoint for him ; such an one an earthly heart, so many impoverishing providences for him. Did you but see this, I need say no more to support the most dejected heart.

*8<sup>th</sup> Help.* It would much conduce to the settlement of your heart, to consider, that by fretting and discontent you do yourself more injury than all the afflictions you lie under could do ; your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting, 'tis you that makes your burden heavy, by struggling under it. Could you but lie quiet under the hand of God, your condition would be much easier than it is. *'Impatience in the sick occasions severity in the physician.'* This makes God lay on more strokes, as a father will upon a stubborn child that receives not correction.

Besides it unfits the soul to pray over its troubles, or take in the sense of that good which God intends by them : Affliction is a pill, which, being wrapt up in patience, and quiet submission, may be easily swallowed ; but discontent chews the pill, and so embitters the soul. God throws away some comfort which he saw would hurt you, and you will throw away your peace after it ; he shoots an arrow which sticks in your cloaths, and was never intended to hurt, but only to fright you from sin ; and you will thrust it onward to the piercing of your very hearts, by despondency and discontent.

*9<sup>th</sup> Help.* If all this will not do, but thy heart, (like Rachel's) still refuses to be comforted, or quieted, then consider one thing more, seriously, which will doubtless do the work ; and that is this - Compare the condition thou art now in (and art so much dissatisfied with) with that condition others are, and in which thyself deservest to be in - Others are roaring in flames, howling under the scourge of vengeance,

and I deserve to be amongst them. O my soul ! is this hell? Is my condition as bad as the damned ? O what would thousands now in hell give to exchange conditions with me ? It is a famous instance which Dr. Taylor gives us of the Duke of Conde ; “*I have read, (saith he) that when the Duke had entered voluntarily into the inconveniences of a religious poverty, he was one day espied and pitied by a lord of Italy, who out of tenderness, wished him to be more careful of his person. The good duke answered, ‘Sir, be not troubled, and think not that I am ill provided, for I send an harbinger before me, who makes ready my lodgings, and takes care that I am royally entertained.’ The lord asked him who was his harbinger ; he answered, ‘The knowledge of myself, and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torments ; and when with this knowledge I arrive at my lodgings, how unprovided soever I find it, methinks it is ever better than I deserve.’ Why doth the living man complain ?* and thus the heart may be kept from desponding or repining under adversity.

*3rd. Season.* The *third season* calling for more than ordinary diligence to keep the heart is *the time of Zion's troubles* : when the Church, like the ship in which Christ and his disciples were, is oppressed, and ready to perish in the waves of persecution, then good souls are ready to sink, and be shipwrecked too upon the billows of their own fears. I confess most men rather need the spur than the reins, in this case, yet some sit down as over-weighed with a sense of the troubles of the church ; the loss of the Ark cost old Eli his life ; the sad posture Jerusalem lay in, made good Nehemiah's countenance change, amidst all the pleasures and accommodations of the court, *Neh. ii. 2.* Ah ! this goes close to honest hearts.

But though God allows, yea command the most awakened apprehensions of these calamities, and in such a day call to ‘*mourning, weeping, and girding with sackcloth, Isa. xxii. 12,*’ ‘*and severely threatens the insensible, Amos, vi. 1,*’ yet it will not please him to see you sit like pensive Elijah under the juniper-tree. ‘*Ah, Lord God ! It is enough, take away my life also : 1 Kings, xix. 4.*’ No, mourners in Zion you may, and ought to be, but self-tormentors you must not be ; complain *to* God you may ; but complain *of* God, (though by an unsuitable carriage, and the language of your actions) you must not.

*3rd. Case.* The third case that comes next to be spoken to, is this - How public and tender hearts may be relieved and supported, when they are over-weighed with the burdensome sense of Zion's troubles? I grant it is hard for him who preferreth Zion to his chief joy, to keep his heart from sinking not below the due sense of its troubles, and yet this ought and may be done by the use of such heart-establishing directions as these:

*1<sup>st</sup> Direction.* Settle this great truth in your hearts - that no trouble befalls Zion but by the permission of Zion's God ; and he permits nothing out of which he will not bring much good to his people.

There is as truly a principle of quietness in the permitting, as well as in the commanding will of God. See it in David, *2 Sam. xvi. 11.* ‘*Let him alone, it may be God hath bidden him.*’ And in Christ, *John, xix. 11,* ‘*Thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above.*’ It should much calm our Spirits, that it is the will of God to suffer it ; and had he not suffered it, it could never have been as it is.

This very consideration quieted Job, Eli, David, and Hezekiah; that the Lord did it was enough to them. And why should it not be so to us ? If the Lord will have Zion ploughed as a field, and her goodly stones lie in the dust ; if it be his pleasure that Anti-Christ shall rage yet longer and wear out the saints of the Most High; if it be his will that a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity, by the Lord God of Hosts, shall be upon the Valley of Vision, that the wicked shall devour the man that is more righteous than he; what are we that we should contend with God ? Fit it is that we should be resigned to that Will, whence we proceeded ; and he that made us should dispose of us as he pleaseth ; He may do what seemeth him good without our consent ; doth poor man stand upon equal ground, that he should capitulate with his Creator, or that God should render him an account of any of his matters? It is reasonable that we should be content, however God disposes of us, as that we be obedient to whatever he commands us.

But, then, if we pursue this argument further, by considering that God's permissions all meet at last in the real good of his people, this will much more quiet our spirits. Do the enemies carry away the

good figs, even the best among the people, into captivity ? This looks like a sad providence, but God sends them thither for their good. Doth God take the Assyrian, as a staff in his hand to beat his people with ? those blows are smart, and make them cry, but the end of his so doing, is, *‘That he may accomplish his whole work upon Mount Zion, Isa. x. 12.’* If God can bring much good out of the worst and greatest evil of sin, much more out of temporal afflictions, it is as evident that he will, as that he can do so : for it is inconsistent with the wisdom of a common agent, to permit any thing which he might prevent if he be pleased, to cross his great design and end. And can it be imagined that the most wise God should do so?

Well, then, let infinite wisdom, power, and love alone, for by these all creatures are swayed, and actions guided, in reference to the church. It is none of our work to rule the world, but to submit to him that doth, for the motions of Providence are all judicious ; it is enough that the affairs of Zion are in a good hand.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Direction.* Ponder this heart-supporting truth, in reference to Sion’s trouble - That how many troubles soever are upon her, yet her King is in her.

What, hath the Lord forsaken his churches ? or hath he sold them into the enemy’s hand ? Doth he not regard what evil befalls them, that our hearts sink at this rate ? Is it not too shameful an undervaluing of the great God, and too much magnifying poor impotent man, to fear and tremble at creatures while God is in the midst of us? The church’s enemies are many and mighty : let that be granted, yet that argument with which Caleb and Joshua strove to raise their own hearts, is of as much force now as it was then: *‘The Lord is with us, fear them not.’ Num. xiv. 9.* The historian tells us, that when Antigonus overheard his soldiers reckoning how many their enemies were, and so discouraging one another, he suddenly stepped in among them with this question, *“And how many do you reckon me for?”* Discouraged souls, how many do you reckon the Lord for ? Is he not an overmatch for all his enemies ? Is not *one Almighty* more than *many mighties* ? Doth his presence stand for nothing with us ? *‘If God be for us, who can be against us,’ Rom. viii. 31* ? What think you was the reason of that great exploration Gideon made in *Judges, vi.* ? He

questions, verse 12, 13 - he desires a sign, v. 17 - and another, v. 36 - and what was the end of all this ? But that he might write this motto upon his ensign, *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.* So, then, if you can be well assured the Lord is with his people, you will get thereby above all your discouragements : and that he is so, you need not (with him) require a sign from heaven, for you have a sign before you, even their marvellous preservation amidst all their enemies. If God be not with his people, how is it that they are not swallowed up quick ? Do their enemies want malice, power, or opportunity ? No, but there is an invisible hand upon them. Well, then, let then his presence give us rest; and though the mountains be hurled into the sea, though heaven and earth mingle together, fear not; God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Direction.* Consider the great advantages attending the people of God in an afflicted condition. - If a low and an afflicted state in the world be really best for the church, then your dejection is not only irrational, but ungrateful ; indeed, if you estimate the happiness of the church by its worldly ease, splendour and prosperity, then such times will seem bad for it ; but if you reckon its glory to consist in its humility, faith, and heavenly-mindedness, no condition in the world abounds with advantages for these as an afflicted condition. It was not persecutions and prisons, but worldliness and wantonness, that was the poison of the church ; neither was it the earthly glory of its professors, but the blood of its martyrs that was the seed of the church. The power of godliness did never thrive better than in affliction, and never ran lower than in times of greatest prosperity ; when *‘we are left a poor and an afflicted people, then we learn to trust in the name of the Lord. Zeph. iii. 12.’* What say you sirs ? Is it indeed for the saint’s advantage to be weaned from delights of ensnaring earthly vanities ? to be quickened and pricked forward with more haste to heaven ? to have clearer discoveries of their own hearts ? to be taught to pray more fervently, frequently, spiritually ? to look and long for the rest to come, more ardently ? If this be for their advantage, experience teacheth us, that no condition is ordinarily blest with such fruits as these, like an afflicted condition.

Is it well, then, to repine and droop, because your Father consults more the advantage of your souls, than the pleasing of your humours ? because he will bring you a nearer way to heaven than you are willing to go ? Is this a due requital of his love, who is pleased so much to concern himself in your welfare? which is more than he will do for thousands in the world, upon whom he will not lay a rod, or spend an affliction for their good, *Hos.* iv. 17, *Mat.* xv. 14 ? But, alas, we judge by sense, and reckon things good or evil, according to what we for the present can taste and feel in them.

*4<sup>th</sup> Direction.* Take heed that you overlook not the many precious mercies which the people of God enjoy amidst all their trouble.

It is a pity that our tears on account of our troubles should so blear and blind our eyes, that we should not feel our mercies, and grounds of comfort. I will not insist upon the mercy of having your life given you for a prey, nor yet upon the many outward comforts, temporal conveniences, and accommodations which you enjoy, even above what Christ and his precious servants, of whom the world was not worthy, ever had.

But what say you to pardon of sin ? interest in Christ ? the covenant of promises ? and an eternity of happiness in the presence of God after a few days are over ? O that ever a people entitled to such mercies as these, should droop under any temporal affliction, or be so much concerned for the frowns of men, and the loss of trifles ! You have not the smiles of great men, but you have the favor of the great God. You are perhaps cast back in your own estates, but thereby furthered in spirituals. You cannot live so bravely, plentifully, and easily as before, but you may live as holy and heavenly as ever. Will you then grieve so much for these circumstantial, as to forget your substantial ? Shall light troubles make you forget weighty mercies ? Remember the true riches of the church are laid out of the reach of all its enemies. They may make you poor but not miserable. What though God do not distinguish in his outward dispensations betwixt his own and others ? Yea, what though his judgments single out the best, and spare the worst ? - What though an Abel be killed in love, and a Cain survive in hatred ? a bloody Dionysius die in his bed, and a good

Josiah fall in battle ? What though the belly of the wicked be filled with hid treasures and the teeth of the saints broken with gravel-stones, yet still here is much matter of praise ; for *electing love* hath distinguished, though *common providence* did not : and whilst prosperity and impunity slay the wicked, even slaying and adversity shall benefit and save the righteous.

*5<sup>th</sup> Direction.* Believe, that how low soever the church be plunged under the waters of adversity, it shall assuredly rise again. - For as sure as Christ arose the third day, notwithstanding the seal and watch that was upon him, so sure the church shall rise out of all her troubles, and lift up its victorious head over all her enemies. - There is no fear of ruining that people who thrive by their losses, and multiply by being diminished. O be not too hasty to bury the church before she is dead! stay till Christ hath tried his skill, before you give it up for lost : the bush may be all in a flame, but shall never be consumed, and that because of the good will of Him that dwelleth in the bush.

*6<sup>th</sup> Direction.* Record the famous instances of God's care and tenderness over his people in former straits.

Christ hath not suffered it to be devoured yet ; for above these sixteen hundred years the Christian church hath been in affliction, and yet is not consumed ; many a wave of persecution hath gone over it, and yet it is not drowned ; many designs to ruin it, and hitherto none hath prospered. This is not the first time that Hamans and Ahithophels have plotted its ruin, that an Herod hath stretched out his hand to vex it. Still it hath been preserved from, supported under, or delivered out of its troubles ; and is it not as dear to God as ever ? Is he not as able to save it now as formerly ? Though we know not whence the deliverance should arise, '*Yet the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, 2 Pet.* ii. 9.'

*7<sup>th</sup> Direction.* If you can obtain no comfort from any of the former arguments, then in the last place - Try whether you cannot draw some comfort out of your very trouble.

Surely this trouble of yours is a good argument of your integrity ; union is the ground of sympathy ; if you had not some rich adventure

in that ship, you would not tremble as you do when it is in danger : Besides, this frame of spirit may afford you this argument, that if you are so sensible of the troubles of the church, Jesus Christ is much more sensible of, and solicitous about it than you can be, and he will cast an eye of favour upon them that mourn for it, *Isa.* lvii. 18.

*4<sup>th</sup> Season.* The *fourth special season*, of expressing our utmost diligence in keeping our hearts, is *the time of danger and public distraction*. In such times the best hearts are too apt to be surprised by slavish fear : it is not easy to secure the heart against distraction in times of common destruction. *‘If Syria be confederate with Ephraim, how do the hearts of the house of David shake, even as the trees of the wood which are shaken with the wind, Isa.* vii. 2.’ When there are ominous signs in the heavens, on the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, then the hearts of men fail for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, *Luke* xxi. 25, 26. Even as Paul himself may sometimes complain of *‘fightings within, when there are fears without, 2 Cor.* vii.5.’

But, my brethren, these things ought not so to be ; saints should be of a more raised spirit ; so was David when his heart was in a good frame, *Psal.* xxvii. 1, *‘The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear ? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid ?’* Let none but the servants of sin be the slaves of fear ; let them that have delighted in evil, fear evil. O let not that which God hath threatened as a judgment upon the wicked, ever seize upon the breasts of the righteous ; *‘I will send faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies, and the sound of a shaking leaf shall chase them. Lev.* xxvi. 36.’ O what poor spiritless men were these, to fly at a shaking leaf, which makes a pleasant and not a terrible noise, and is in itself a kind of natural musick ; but to a guilty conscience, the whistling leaves are drums and trumpets. *‘But God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of love, and of a sound mind, 2 Tim.* i. 7.’ A sound mind, as it stands there in opposition to the spirit of fear, is an unwounded conscience, not weakened by guilt : and this should make a man as bold as a lion. I know it cannot be said of a saint, as God said of *Leviathan*, that he is made without fear. There is a natural fear in every man, and it is as impossible to be wholly put off, as the body itself is

; It is a perturbation of the mind, rising from the apprehension of approaching danger - and as long as dangers can approach us, we shall find some perturbations within us. ‘tis not my purpose to recommend to you a stoical apathy, nor yet to take you off from such a degree of cautious fear as may fit you for trouble and be serviceable to your souls. There is a provident fear that opens your eyes to foresee danger, which quickens us to a prudent and lawful use of means to prevent it. Such was Jacob’s fear, *Gen.* xxxii. 7, 9, 10, &c. and such his prudence when expecting to meet his angry brother Esau. But it is the fear of diffidence. I warn you to keep your heart; that tyrannical passion which invades the heart in times of danger, and distracts, weakens and unfits it for duty, drives men upon unlawful means, and brings a snare with it.

*4<sup>th</sup> Case.* How a Christian may keep his heart from distracting and tormenting fears in times of great and threatening dangers.

Now there are fourteen excellent rules or helps for keeping the heart from sinful fear when imminent dangers threaten us.

*1<sup>st</sup> Rule.* Look upon all creatures as in the hand of God, who manages them in all their motions ; limiting, restraining and determining them at his pleasure.

Get this great truth well settled by faith in your hearts, it will marvellously guard you against slavish fears. The first of *Ezekiel* contains an admirable scheme, or draught of Providence ; there you may see the living creatures who move the wheels, or great revolutions of things here below, coming unto Christ, who sits upon the throne, to receive new orders and instructions from him. In *Revelation*, vi. you read of white, black, and red horses, which are nothing else but the instruments which God employs in executing his judgments in the world, as wars, pestilence, and death ; but when these horses are prancing up and down in the world, here is that which will quiet your hearts, that God has the reins in his hand. Wicked men are sometimes like mad horses, they would stamp the people of God under their feet, but that the bridle of Providence is in their lips, *John* xix. 11, 12. A lion at liberty is terrible to meet ; but who is afraid of the lion, in the keeper’s hand ?

2<sup>nd</sup> Rule. Remember that this God in whose hand all the creatures are, is your Father, and is much more tender of you, than you are or can be, over yourselves ; *'He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye, Zech. ii. 8.'* Let me ask the most timorous woman, whether there be not a vast difference between the sight of a drawn sword in the hand of a bloody ruffian, and of the same sword in the hand of their own tender husband ? As great a difference there is between looking upon creatures, by an eye of sense, and looking on them as in the hand of your God, by an eye of faith ; that is a sweet scripture in this purpose, *Isa. liv. 5, 'Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name;'* He is Lord of all the Hosts of creatures in the world ; who would be afraid to pass through an army, though all the soldiers should turn their swords and guns towards him, if the general of that army were his friend or father ? I have met with an excellent story of a religious young man, who being at sea with many other passengers in a great storm, and they being half dead with fear, he only was observed to be very cheerful, as if he had been but little concerned in that danger ; one of them demanding the reason of his cheerfulness, *"O, (said he) because the pilot of the ship is my Father."* Consider Christ first, as the King and Supreme Lord over the providential kingdom, and then as Your head, Husband and Friend, and thou wilt quickly say, *"Return unto thy rest, O my soul."* This truth will make you cease trembling, and fall a singing in the midst of dangers, *Psal. xlvii. 7, 'The Lord is King of all the earth, sing ye praise with under-standing,'* or as the Hebrew word is, *'every one that hath under-standing,' viz. of this heart-reviving and establishing doctrine of the dominion of our Father over all creatures.*

3<sup>rd</sup> Rule. Urge upon your hearts the express prohibition of Christ in this case ; and let your hearts stand in awe of the violation of them.

He hath charged you not to fear, *Luke xxi. 9, 'When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, see that ye be not terrified.'* and *Phil. i. 23, 'In nothing be terrified by your adversaries ;'* yea, in *Mat. x. 26, 28, 31,* and within the compass of six verses, our Savior commands us thrice, *'not to fear men.'* Doth every big word of proud dust and ashes

make thee afraid ? Doth the voice of a man make thee tremble ? And shall not the voice of God ? If thou art of such a fearful and timorous spirit, how is it that thou fearest not to disobey the express commands of Jesus Christ ? Methinks the command of Christ should have as much power to calm, as the voice of a poor worm to terrify thy heart; *Isa. li. 12, 13, 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you : Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die ? and of the son of man that shall be made as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker ?'* We cannot fear creatures sinfully till we have forgotten God. Did we remember what he is, and what he hath said, we should not be of such feeble spirits. Bring thy heart then to this dilemma in times of danger: *'If I let into my heart the slavish fear of man, I must let out the reverential awe and fear of God ; and dare I cast off the fear of the Almighty for the frowns of a man ? Shall I lift up proud dust above the great God ? Shall I run upon a certain sin, to shun a probable danger?'* Oh, keep thy heart by that consideration.

4<sup>th</sup> Rule. Remember how much needless trouble your vain fears have brought upon you formerly, and how you have disquieted yourselves to no purpose.

*Isa. li. 13, 'And hast feared continually because of the oppressor, as if he were ready to devour ; and where is the fury of the oppressor ?'* He seemed ready to devour, yet you are not devoured ; I have not brought upon you the thing that ye feared ; you have wasted your spirit, disordered your souls, and weakened your hands, and all this to no purpose. You might have all this while enjoyed your peace, and possessed your souls in patience. And here I cannot but observe a very deep policy of Satan in managing a design against the soul by these vain fears. I call them vain in regard of the frustration of them by Providence, but certainly they are not in vain as the end Satan aims at in raising them, for herein he acts as soldiers use to do in the siege of a garrison, who on purpose to wear out the besieged by constant watchings, and thereby unfit them to make resistance when they storm it in earnest, do every night rouse them with false alarms, which though they come to nothing, yet do notable serve this further design of the enemy. O, when will you beware of Satan's devices ?

5<sup>th</sup> Rule. Consider solemnly, that though the things you fear should really fall out, yet there is more evil in your own fear than in the thing feared.

And that not only as the least evil of sin, is worse than the greatest evil of suffering ; but as this sinful fear hath really more torment and trouble in it, than there is in that condition you are so much afraid of ; fear is both a multiplying and a tormenting passion ; it represents troubles much greater than they are, and so torments and racks the soul much more than when the suffering itself comes ; as it was with Israel at the Red Sea; when they cried out and were sore afraid, till they put foot into the water, and then a passage was cut through those waters which they thought would have drowned them. Thus it is with us, we looking through the glass of carnal fear upon the waters of trouble, the swellings of Jordan, cry out, “*O, they are unfordable ! We must needs perish in them !*” But when we come into the midst of those floods indeed, we find the promise made good, ‘*God will make a way to escape, 1 Cor. x. 13.*’ Thus it was with blessed Bilney, when he would make a trial by putting his finger to the candle, and not being able to endure that, he cried out, “*What ? Cannot I bear the burning of a finger ? How then shall I be able to bear the burning of my whole body tomorrow ?*” And yet when that morrow came, he could go cheerfully into the flames, with that scripture in his mouth, *Isa. xliii. 1, 2, 3, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed thee ; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine ; when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burnt.’*

6<sup>th</sup> Rule. Consult the many precious promises which are written for your support and comfort in all dangers.

These are your refuges to which you may fly and be safe ; when the arrows of danger fly by night, and destruction wasteth at noon day. These are particular promises suited to particular cases and exigencies, and there are general promises reaching all cases and conditions ; such as these, *Rom. viii. 28, ‘All things work together for good, &c.’* and *Eccl. viii. 12, ‘Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet it shall be well with them that fear the Lord, &c.’* Could you but believe the promises your heart should be established,

*2 Chron. xx. 29.* Could you but plead them with God, as Jacob did, *Gen. xxxii. 12, ‘Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, &c.’* they would relieve you in every distress.

*Objection.* But that promise was made personally and by name to him, so are not these to me.

*Answer.* If Jacob’s God be your God, you have as good an interest in them as he had. The Church a thousand years after that transaction between God and Jacob, applied that which God spake to him, as if it had been spoken to themselves, *Hos. xii. 4, ‘He found him in Bethlehem, and there he spake with us.’*

7<sup>th</sup> Rule. Quiet your trembling hearts, by recording and consulting your past experiences of the care and faithfulness of God in former distresses.

These experiences are food for your faith in a wilderness condition, *Psal. lxxiv. 17.* By this David kept his heart in time of danger, *1 Sam. xvii. 37,* and Paul his, *2 Cor. i. 10.* It was sweetly answered by Silentiarius, when one told him that his enemies way-laid him to take away his life, “*If God take no care of me, how have I escaped hither-to ?*” You may plead with God old experiences to procure new ones; for it is in pleading with God for new deliverances, as it is in pleading for new pardons. Now mark how Moses pleads on that account with God, *Num. xiv. 19, ‘Pardon, I beseech thee the iniquity of this people, as thou hast forgiven them from Egypt until now.’* He does not say as men do, Lord, this is the first fault, or thou hast not been troubled before to sign their pardon ; but, Lord, because thou hast pardoned them so often, I beseech thee pardon them once again. So in new straits, Lord, thou hast often heard, helped, and saved, in former fears, therefore now help again, for with thee there is plenteous redemption, and thine arm is not shortened.

8<sup>th</sup> Rule. Be well satisfied that you are in the way of your duty, and that will beget holy courage in times of danger.

‘*Who will harm you if you be followers of that which is good?*’ *1 Pet. iii. 13 ;* or if any dare attempt it, ‘*you may boldly commit yourself to God in well-doing,*’ *1 Pet. iv. 19.* It was this consideration that raised Luther’s spirit above all fear : “*In the cause of God, (said he) I*



*ever am, and ever shall be stout. Herein I assume this title ;' a good cause will bear up a man's spirit bravely. A good cause will bear up a man's spirit bravely. Hear the saying of a heathen, to the shame of cowardly Christians : when the emperor Vespasian had commanded Fluidus Priseus, not to come to the senate, or if he did, to speak nothing but what he would have him, the senator returned this noble answer, that he was a senator, it was fit he should be at the senate ; and if being there he were required to give his advice, he would speak freely that which his conscience commanded him ; the emperor threatening that then he should die, he answered, "Did I ever tell you that I was immortal ? Do you what you will, and I will do what I ought ; it is in your power to put me to death unjustly, and in me to die constantly."*

Righteousness is a breastplate, the cause of God will pay all your expences, let them only tremble whom danger finds out of the way of duty.

*9<sup>th</sup> Rule.* Get your conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ from all guilt, and that will set your hearts above all fear.

It is guilt upon the conscience that softens and cowardizes our spirits ; *'the righteous are bold as a lion,'* Prov. xxviii. 1. It was guilt in Cain's conscience that made him cry, *"Every one that meets me will slay me,"* Gen. iv. 14. A guilty conscience is more terrified with conceited dangers, than a pure conscience is with real ones. A guilty sinner carries a witness against himself in his own bosom. It was guilty Herod that cried out, *"John Baptist is risen from the dead."* Such a conscience is the devil's anvil, on which he fabricates all those swords and spears, with which the guilty sinner pierces and wounds himself. Guilt is to danger, what fire is to gun-powder ; a man need not fear to walk among many barrels of powder, if he have no fire about him.

*10<sup>th</sup> Rule.* Exercise holy trust, in times of great distress.

Make it your business to trust God with your lives and comforts, and then your hearts will be at rest about them. So did David, *Psal. lvii. 3, 'At what time I am afraid I will trust in thee.'* Lord, if at any time a storm arise, I will make bold to shelter from it under the cover of thy wings. Go to God by acts of faith and trust, and never doubt that he will secure you, *Isa. lxii. 3, 'Thou wilt keep him in*

*perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee ;' God takes it well when thou comest to him thus ; "Father, my life, my liberty, or estate ; are hunted after, and I cannot secure them ; O let me leave them in thy hand, the poor leaveth himself with thee ;"* and doth his God fail him ? No, *'thou art the helper of the fatherless.'* *Psal. x. 14,* that is, thou art the helper of the destitute one, that hath none to go to but God. And that is a comforting Scripture, *Psal. cxii. 7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord ;'* he doth not say, his ear shall be privileged from the report of evil tidings ; he may hear as sad tidings as other men, but his heart shall be privileged from the terror of those tidings ; his heart is fixed.

*11<sup>th</sup> Rule.* Consult the honor of Religion more, and your personal safety less.

Is it for the honor of Religion (think you) that Christians should be as timorous as hares, to start at every sound ? Will not this tempt the world to think, that whatever you talk, yet your principles are no better than other men's ? O what mischief may the discoveries of your fears before them do ? 'Twas a noble saying of *Neh. vi. 11, 'Should such a man as I flee ? And who, being as I am flee ?'* Were it not better you should die, than that the world should be prejudiced against Christ by your example ? For alas ! how apt is the world (who judge more by what they see in your practices, than by what they understand of your principles) to conclude from your timorousness, that how much soever you commend faith, and talk of assurance, yet you dare trust to those things no more than they, when it comes to the trial. O let not your fears lay such a stumbling-block before the blind world.

*12<sup>th</sup> Rule.* He that would secure the heart from fear, must first secure the eternal interest of his soul in the hands of Jesus Christ.

When this is done, then you may say, *'Now, world, do thy worst.'* You will not be very solicitous about a vile body, when you are once assured it shall be well to all eternity with your precious souls. *"Fear not them (saith Christ) that can kill the body, and after that have no power that they can do."* The assured Christian may smile with contempt upon all his enemies, and say, *"Is this the worst that you can do ?"* What say you, Christian, are you assured that your souls are

safe, that within a few moments of your dissolution they shall be received by Christ into everlasting habitations ? Well, if you be sure of that, never trouble yourselves about the instruments and means of your dissolution.

*Objection.* O, but a violent death is terrible to nature.

*Answer.* But what matter is it, when the soul is in heaven, whether it were let out at thy mouth, or at thy throat ? Whether thy familiar friends, or barbarous enemies, stand about the dead body, and close thine eyes ? Alas, it is not worth the making so much ado about, thy soul shall not be sensible in heaven how thy body is used on earth, no, it shall be swallowed up in life.

*13<sup>th</sup> Rule.* Learn to quench all slavish creature fears in the reverential fear of God.

This is a cure by diversion. It is an exercise of Christian wisdom, to turn those passions of the soul which most predominate into spiritual channels, to turn natural anger into spiritual zeal, natural mirth into holy cheerfulness, and natural fear into an holy dread and awe of God. This method of cure Christ prescribes in that fore-mentioned place, *Mat. x.* Like to which is that in *Isa. viii. 12, 13.* ‘*Fear not their fear ;*’ But how shall we help it ? Why, sanctify the Lord of hosts himself ; and let him be your fear, and your dread. Natural fear may be allayed for the present by natural reason, or the removal of the occasion, but then ‘tis like a candle blown out with a puff of breath which is easily blown in again, but if the fear of God extinguish it, then ‘tis like a candle quenched in water, which cannot easily be rekindled.

*14<sup>th</sup> Rule.* Lastly pour out those fears to God in prayer, which the devil and your own unbelief pour in upon you in times of danger.

Prayer is the best outlet in fear. Where is the Christian that cannot see the use of this direction ? I will give you the greatest example in the world to encourage you in the use of it, even the example of Jesus Christ, *Mark xiv. 22.* When the hour of his danger and death drew nigh, he gets into the garden, separates from the disciples, and there wrestles mightily with God in prayer, even unto an agony : In reference to which the Apostle saith, *Heb. v. 7.* ‘*who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong*

*cries and tears, to him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.*’ He was heard as to strength and support to carry him through it, though not as to deliverance, or exemption from it.

Now, O that these things may abide with you, and be reduced to practice in these evil days, that many trembling may be established by them.

*5<sup>th</sup> Season.* The *fifth season*, to exert this diligence in keeping the heart, is *the time straits and outward pinching wants* : although at such times we should complain to God, and not of God (the Throne of Grace being erected for a ‘*time of need,*’ *Heb. iv. 16*) yet when the waters of relief run low, and wants begin to press, how prone are the best hearts to distrust the Fountain ! When the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruise are almost spent, our faith and patience are almost spent too. Now it is difficult to keep the proud and unbelieving heart in an holy quietude and submission at the foot of God. ‘Tis an easy thing to talk of trusting God for daily bread while we have a full barn or purse ; but to say as the prophet, *Hab. iii. 17.* “*Though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine, &c. yet will I rejoice in the Lord.*” *Sure this is not easy.* The *5<sup>th</sup> Case* therefore shall be this.

*5<sup>th</sup> Case.* How a Christian may keep his heart from distrusting God, or repining against him when outward wants are either felt or feared.

This case deserves to be seriously pondered, and especially to be studied now, since it seems to be the design of Providence to empty the people of God of their creature fulness, and acquaint them with those straits which hitherto they have been altogether strangers to.

Now to secure the heart from the fore-mentioned dangers attending this condition, these following considerations, through the blessing of the Spirit, may prove effectual. And the first is this,

*1<sup>st</sup> Consideration.* That if God reduce you to straits and necessities, yet he deals no otherwise therein with you, than he hath done with some of the choicest and holiest men that ever lived.

Your condition is not singular, though you have hitherto been strangers to wants other saints have daily conversed, and been familiarly acquainted with them. Hear what blessed *Paul* speaks, not

of himself only, but in the name of other saints reduced to like exigencies, *1 Cor. iv. 11, 'Even to this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place.'* To see such a man as *Paul* going up and down the world with a naked back, and empty belly, and not a house to put his head in, one that was so far above thee in grace and holiness, one that did more service for God in a day than perhaps thou hast done in all thy days, and yet repine as hardly dealt with ! Have you forgotten what necessities and straits even a *David* hath suffered ? How great were his straits and necessities, *1 Sam. xxv. 6, "Give, I pray thee (saith he to Nabal) whatsoever cometh to thy hand, to thy servants, and to thy son David."* Renowned *Mussulus* was forced to dig in the town ditch for a maintenance. Famous *Ainsworth* (I have been credibly informed) was forced to sell the bed he lay upon to buy bread. But why speak I of these ? Behold a greater than any of them, even the Son of God, who is the heir of all things, and by whom the worlds were made ; yet sometimes would have been glad of any thing, having nothing to eat. *Mark xi. 12, 'And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree afar off, leaving leaves, he came if haply he might find any thing thereon.'*

Well then, hereby then God has set no mark of hatred upon you, neither can you infer want of love from want of bread. When thy repining heart puts the question, Was there ever sorrow like unto mine? ask these worthies, and they will tell thee ; though they did not complain and fret as thou dost, yet they were driven to as great straits.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Consideration.* If God leave you not in this necessitous condition without a promise, you have no reason to repine or despond under it.

That is a sad condition indeed, to which no promise belongs. I remember *Mr. Calvin*, upon those words, *Isa. ix. 1, 'Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, &c.'* solves the doubt, in what sense the darkness of the captivity was not so great, as the incursions made by *Tiglath Pileser*. In the captivity the city was destroyed and the temple burnt with fire ; there was no comparison in the affliction : but yet the darkness should not such, and the reason is this - there was a certain promise made to this case, but none to the

other.

It is better to be as low as hell with a promise, than to be in paradise without one. Even the darkness of hell itself would be comparatively no darkness at all, were there but a promise to enlighten it. Now God hath left many sweet promises for the faith of his poor people to live on in this condition, *Psal. xxxiv. 9, 10, 'O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him ; the lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall want nothing that is good.'* - *Psal. xxxiii. 18, 19, 'The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous, to keep them alive in famine.'* - *Psal. lxxxiv. 11, 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.'* - *Rom. viii. 32, 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?'* - *Isa. xii. 17, 'When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them. I the God of Israel will not forsake them.'* Here you see ; 1). their extreme wants, water being put even for their necessities of life. 2). their certain relief ; '*I the Lord will hear them :*' in which it is supposed, that they cry unto him in their straits, and he hears their cry.

Having therefore, these promises, why should not your distrustful heart conclude like *David's*, *Psal. xxiii. 1, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want ?'*

*Objection.* But these promises imply conditions ; if they were absolute, they would afford more satisfaction.

*Solution.* What are those tacit conditions you speak of, but these : (1.) that either he will supply or sanctify your wants : (2.) that you shall have so much as God sees fit for you. And doth this trouble you ? Would you have the mercy whether sanctified or not ? Whether God sees fit for you or not ? Methinks the appetites of saints after earthly things should not be so ravenous as to seize greedily upon any enjoyment not caring how they have it.

But oh, when wants pinch, and we see not whence supplies should come, then our faith in the promise shakes, and we, like murmuring *Israel*, cry, "*He gave us bread, can he give us water also?*" O unbelieving hearts ! when did his promise fail ? who ever trusted them and was ashamed ? May not God upbraid thee with thine unreasonable infidelity ? as *Jer. ii. 31, 'Have I been a wilderness unto*

you, &c.’ or as Christ said to the disciples, “*Since I was with you, lacked ye any thing ?*” Yea, may you not upbraid yourselves ; may you not say with good old Polycarp, “*Thus many years I have served Christ, and found him a good Master ;*” indeed, he may deny what your wantonness, but not what your real wants call for ; he will not regard the cry of your lusts, nor yet despise the cry of your faith ; though he will not indulge and humour your wanton appetites, yet he will not violate his own faithful promises. These promises are your best security for eternal life ; and it is strange if they should not satisfy you for daily bread. Remember ye the words of the Lord, and solace your hearts with them amidst all your wants. It is said of Epicurus, that in dreadful fits of the cholick, he often refreshed himself by calling to mind his inventions in philosophy : and of Possodonius the philosopher, that in an fits of the stone, he solaced himself with discourses on moral virtue ; and when the pain gripped him, he would say, “*O pain, thou dost nothing ; although thou art a little troublesome, I will never confess thee to be an evil.*” - If upon such grounds as these they could support themselves under such grinding and rack-ing pains, and even delude their diseases by them, how much rather should the precious promises of God, and the sweet experiences which have gone along step by step with them, make you forget all your wants, and comfort you in every strait.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Consideration.* If it is bad now, it might have been worse : hath God denied thee the comforts of this life ? He might have denied thee Christ, peace, and pardon, also, and then thy case had been woeful indeed.

You know God hath done so to millions in the world : how many such wretched objects may our eyes behold every day, that have no comfort in hand, nor yet in hope ; that are miserable here, and will be so to eternity ; that have a bitter cup, and nothing to sweeten it, not so much as a hope that it will be better. But it is not so with you, though you be poor in this world, yet ‘*rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised, James ii. 5*’ O learn to set spiritual riches against temporal poverty. Balance all your present trouble with your spiritual privileges. Indeed, if God had denied your souls the robes of righteousness to clothe them, the hidden manna to feed them,

and the heavenly mansions to receive them ; if your souls were left destitute, as well as bodies, you might well be pensive ; but this consideration hath enough to bring the considering soul to rest under any outward strait. It was bravely said by Luther, when want began to pinch him, “*Let us be contented with our hard fare, for do not we feast with angels upon Christ, the bread of life ?*” And “*Blessed be God, (saith Paul) who hath abounded to us in all spiritual blessings.*”

*4<sup>th</sup> Consideration.* This affliction, though great, not such an affliction, but God hath far greater, with which he chastises the dearly beloved of his soul in this world, and should he remove this, and inflict those, you would account your present state a very comfortable state, and bless God to be as you now are.

What think you sirs ? Should God remove your present troubles, supply all your outward wants, give you the desire of your hearts in creature comforts, but hide his face from you, shoot his arrows into your soul, and cause the venom of them to drink up your spirits ? Should he leave you but a few days to the buffetings of Satan and his blasphemous injections ? Should he hold your eyes but a few nights waking with horrors of conscience, being tossed to and fro till the dawning of the day ? Should he lead you through the chambers of death ? Show you the visions of darkness ? And make his terrors set themselves in array against you ? Then tell me if you would not count it a choice mercy to be back again in your former necessitous condition, with peace of conscience ; and count bread and water, with God's favor, a happy state ? O then ! take heed of repining. Say not that God deals hardly with you, lest you provoke him to convince you, by your own sense and feeling, that he has worse rods than these for unsubmissive and froward children.

*5<sup>th</sup> Consideration.* If it be had now, it will be better shortly.

O keep thy heart by that consideration, the meal in the barrel is almost spent ; well, be it so, why should that trouble me, if I am almost beyond the need and use of these things. The traveller hath spent almost all his money, but a shilling or two left ; Well, (saith he) though my money be almost spent, yet my journey is almost finished too ; I am near home, and then shall be fully supplied. If there be no candles in

the house yet it is a comfort to think that it is almost day and then there will be no need of candles. I am afraid Christian, you deceive yourself, when you think my provision is almost spent, and I have a great way to travel, many years to live, and nothing to live upon: it may be not half so many as you suppose ; in this be confident, if thy provision be spent, either fresh supplies are coining (though you see not from whence) or you are nearer your journey's end than you reckon yourself to be. Desponding soul, doth it become a man or woman travelling upon the road to that heavenly city, and almost arrived there within a few days' journey of his father's house, where all his wants shall be supplied, to take on thus about a little meat, drink, or clothes, which he fears he shall want by the way ! It was a noble saying the forty martyrs, famous in the ecclesiastical story, when turned out naked in a frosty night to be starved to death, with these words they comforted one another, the winter indeed is sharp and cold, but heaven is warm and comfortable ; here we shiver for cold, but Abraham's bosom will make amends for all.

*Objection 1.* But I may die for want.

*Solution 1.* Who ever did so ? When were the righteous forsaken ? If so, your journey is ended, and you fully supplied.

*Objection 2.* But I am not sure of that, were I sure of heaven, it would be another matter.

*Solution 2.* Are you not sure of that ! then you have other matters to trouble yourselves about ; methinks this should be the least of all your cares ; I do not find that souls perplexed about the want of Christ, pardon of sin, &c. are usually very anxious or solicitous about these things. He that seriously puts such questions as these, What shall I do to be saved ? how shall I know my sin is pardoned ? doth not usually trouble himself with, what shall I eat ? what shall I drink ? or where-withal shall I be clothed ?

*6<sup>th</sup> Consideration.* Doth it become the children of such a father to distrust his all-sufficiency, or repine against any of his dispensations?

Do you well to question his care and love upon every new exigency ? say, have you not been ashamed of this formerly ? Hath not your father's seasonable provisions for you in former straits put you to

the blush, and made you resolve never to question his love and care anymore, and yet will you renew your unworthy suspicions of him again ! Disingenuous child ! reason thus with thyself ; if I perish for want of what is good and needful for me, it must be either because my father knows not my wants, or hath not wherewith to supply them, or regards not what becomes of me. Which of these shall I charge upon him ? Not the first, for *Mark* vi. 32, 'My father knows what I have need of ; my condition is not hid from him : not the second, for, '*the earth is the Lords and the fatness of it, Psal.* xxiv. 1.' His name is '*God All-sufficient, Gen.* xvii. 1.' Not the last, for, '*as a Father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him, Psal.* ciii. 13.' '*The Lord is exceeding pitiful, and of tender mercy, James* v. 13.' '*He hears the young ravens when they cry, Job* xxxviii. 41,.' And will he not hear me ? '*Consider (saith Christ) the fowls of the air, Mat.* vi. 26.' Not the fowls at the door, that are fed every day by hand, but the fowls of the air that have none to provide for them. Doth he feed and clothe his enemies, and will he forget his children ? He heard the very cry of Ishmael in distress, *Gen.* xxi. 17. O my unbelieving heart ! dost thou yet doubt ? Remember Hagar and the child.

*7<sup>th</sup> Consideration.* Your poverty is not your sin, but your affliction only, if by sinful means you have not brought it upon yourselves, and if it be but an affliction, it may be borne the easier for that.

It is hard indeed to bear an affliction coming upon us as the fruit and punishment of sin ; when men are under trouble upon that account, they use to say, "*Oh ! if it were but a single affliction coming from the hand of God by way of trial, I could bear it ; I have brought it upon myself by sin, it comes as the punishment of sin, the marks of God's displeasure are upon it. It is the guilt within that troubles and galls more than the want without.*"

But it is not so here; and therefore you have no reason to be cast down under it.

*Objection 1.* But although there is no sting of guilt, yet this condition wants not other stings ; as, first, the discredit of religion ; I cannot comply with mine engagements in the world, and thereby religion is like to suffer.

*Solution 1.* It is well you have an heart to discharge every duty, yet if God disable you by providence, it is no discredit to your profession because you do not that which you cannot do, so long as it is your desire and endeavor to do what you can and ought to do ; and in this case God's will is, that lenity and forbearance be exercised toward you, Deut. xxiv. 12, 13.

*Objection 2.* But it grieves me to behold the necessities of others, whom I was wont to relieve and refresh, but now cannot.

*Solution 2.* If you cannot, it ceases to be your duty, and God accepts the drawing out of your soul to the hungry in compassion and desire to help them, although you cannot draw forth a full purse to relieve and supply them.

*Objection 3.* But I find such a condition full of temptations, a sore clog in the way to heaven.

*Solution 3.* Every condition in the world hath its clogs and attending temptations, and were you in a prosperous condition you might there meet with more temptations and fewer advantages than you now have : for although I confess poverty hath its temptations as well as prosperity, yet I am confident prosperity hath not those advantages that poverty hath ; for here you have an opportunity to discover the sincerity of your love to God, when you can live upon him, find enough in him, and constantly follow him, even when all external inducements and motives fail. And thus I have showed you how to keep your hearts from the temptations and dangers attending a low condition in the world, when want pinches and the heart begins to sink, then improve and bless God for these helps to keep it.

*6<sup>th</sup> Season.* The *sixth season* requiring this diligence in keeping the heart, is *the season of duty* ; when we draw nigh to God in public, private, or secret duties, it is time to look towards the heart, for the vanity of the heart seldom discovers itself more than at such times. How often doth the poor soul cry out, O Lord, how fain would I serve thee, but vain thoughts will not let me ; I come to open my heart to thee, to delight my soul in communion with thee, but my corruptions have set upon me : Lord, disperse these vain thoughts, and suffer them not to prostitute the soul, which is espoused to thee, before thy face. The sixth case then is this

*6<sup>th</sup> Case.* How the heart may be kept from distractions by vain thoughts in time of duty.

There is a twofold distraction, or wandering of the heart in duty:

(1.) *Voluntary and habitual*, Psal. lxxxviii. 8. '*They set not their hearts aright, and their spirit was not steadfast with God.*' This is the case of formalists, and it proceeds from the want of an holy inclination of the heart to God ; their hearts are under the power of their lusts, and therefore it is no wonder they go after their lusts, even when they are about holy things, Ezek. xxxiii. 31..

(2.) *Involuntary and lamented distractions*, Rom. vii. 21, 24. '*I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. O wretched man that I am, &c.*' This proceeds not from the want of an holy bent and aim, but from the weakness and imperfection of grace. and the want of vigilance in opposing in-dwelling sin. And in this case the soul may make the lie complaint against its own corruptions, Abijah did against Jeroboam, 2 Chron. xiii.6, 7. '*Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, is risen up against his Lord, when Rehoboam was young and tender hearted, and could not withstand them, and there are gathered unto him vain men the children of Belial*' Grace hath a dominion, but lusts are mutinous and seditious, during the infancy thereof. But it is not my business to show you how these distractions come into the heart, but rather how to get and keep them out of the heart ; in order whereto take these ten following helps.

*1<sup>st</sup> Help.* Sequester yourselves from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn preparation to meet God in duty ; you cannot come reeking hot out of the world into God's presence, but you will find a tang of it in your duties : it is with the heart a few minutes since plunged in the world, and now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working, muddy and disquiet, although the wind has fell, and the storm is over : thy heart must have some time to settle. There are few musicians that can take down a Lute, or Viol, and play presently upon it without some time to tune it ; and few Christians that can presently say, "*O my God, my heart is fixed, it is fixed.* Psal. lvii. 7." O when thou goest to God in any duty, examine thy heart and say, "*O, my soul, I am now address-ing*

*myself to the greatest work that a ever a creature was employed about : I am going into the awful presence of God about business of everlasting life.*

*O, my soul, leave trifling now, be composed, watchful, and serious ; this is no common work ; it is God's work - soul-work - eternity work. I am now going forth bearing seed, which will bring forth fruit to life or death in the world to come ; pause awhile upon thy sins, wants, and troubles ; address thyself to duty. David first mused, and then spoke with his tongue, Psal. xxxix. 3,4, - xiv. 1, My heart is inditing, &c."*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Help.* Having composed thy heart by previous meditation, presently set a guard upon your senses ; how often are poor Christians in danger of losing the eyes of their mind, by those of their body ; for this, *Job covenanted with his senses. Job xxxi. 1.* - For this, David prayed, "*Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way, Psal. cxix. 37.*" This may serve to expound that mystical Arabian proverb, which advises to *Shut the windows, that the house may be light.* It were excellent if you could say in your onsets upon duty, as an holy one once did when he came off from duty ; "*Be shut, O mine eyes, be shut : for it is impossible that you should ever see such beauty and glory in any creature, as I have now seen in God.*" You need to avoid all occasions of distraction from without, for be sure you will meet enough from within ; intention of spirit in the work of God, locks up the eye and ear against vanity. When Mercellus entered the gates of Syracuse, Archimedes was so intent about his mathematical scheme, that he took no notice of the soldiers when they entered his very study, with drawn swords ; a fervent cannot be a vagrant heart.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Help.* Beg of God a mortified fancy. A working fancy, how much soever it be extolled among men, is a great snare to the soul, except it work in fellowship with right reason, and a sanctified heart. The imagination is a power of the soul placed between the senses and the understanding ; it is that which first stirs itself in the soul, and by its motion the other powers are stirred ; it is the common shop where thoughts are first forged and framed ; and as this is, so are they ; if imaginations be not first cast down, it is impossible that every thought

of the heart should be brought into obedience to Christ, *2 Cor. x. 5.* This fancy is naturally the wildest and most untameable power of the soul. Some Christians (especially such as are of hot and dry constitutions) have much to do with it.

And truly, the more spiritual the heart is, the more it is troubled about the vanity and wildness of it. O what a sad thing it is, that thy nobler soul must run up and down after a vain roving fancy ; that such a beggar should ride on horseback, and such a prince run on foot ; that it should call off the soul from attendance upon God, when it is most sweetly engaged in communion with him ; to prosecute such vanities as it would have started at before it ! Beg earnestly of God, that the power of sanctification may once come upon it. Some Christians have attained such a degree of sanctification, that they have had much sweetness left upon their hearts by the spiritual workings of it in the night season : when thy fancy is mortified, thy thoughts will be more orderly and fixed.

*4th Help.* If thou wouldst keep thy heart from these vain excursions, realize to thyself, by faith, the holy told awful presence of God in duties.

If the presence of a grave man will compose us to seriousness, how much more will the presence of an holy God ? Thinkest thou thy soul durst be so heedless and light, if the sense of a Divine eye were upon it ? Remember, the place where thou art, is the place of his feet, *Isa. lx. 13.* Act faith upon the omniscency of God ; '*All the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, and I will give to every one of you according to your works, Rev. ii. 23.*' - '*All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, Heb. iv. 12.*' - Realise his infinite holiness : into what a serious composed frame did the sight of God in his holiness put the spirit of the prophet, *Isa. vi. 5* ? Labor to get also upon thy heart due apprehensions of the greatness of God, such as Abraham had ; '*I that am but dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak to God, Gen. xviii. 27.* And lastly, remember the jealousy of God over his worship ; '*And Moses said unto Aaron, this is what the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that draw nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified, Lev. x. 8.*'

*“A man that is praying, (saith Bernard), should behave himself as if he were entering into the court of heaven, where he sees the Lord upon his Throne, surrounded with ten thousand of his angels and saints, ministering unto him.”*

When thou comest from a duty in which thy heart hath been toying and wandering thou mayest say, verily, God was in this place and I knew it not. - Suppose all the impertinences and vanities which have passed through thine heart in a duty, were written out, and inter-lined with thy petitions, couldst thou have the face to present it to God? Should thy tongue but utter all the thoughts of thy heart in prayer, would not men abhor thee? Why thy thoughts are vocal to God, *Psal. cxxxix. 2.* If thou wert petitioning a king, for thy life, would it not provoke him to see thee playing with thy hand-strings, or catching every fly that lights upon thy clothes whilst thou art speaking to him about such serious matters? O, think sadly upon that scripture; *‘God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are round about him, Psal. lxxxvii. 7.’* Why did God descend in thunders, and lightnings and dark clouds, upon Sinai, *Exod. xix. 16-18.* Why did the mountains smoke under him; the people quake and tremble round about him, yea, Moses himself not exempted, but to teach the people this great truth. *‘Let us have grace, whereby we may serve Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire, Heb. xii. 28,29.’* Present God thus before thee, and thy vain heart will quickly be reduced to a more serious frame.

*5<sup>th</sup> Help.* Maintain a prayerful frame of heart in the intervals of duty.

What is the reason our hearts are so dull, careless, and wandering, when we come to hear or pray, but because there have been long intermissions in our communion with God, by reason whereof the heart is out of a praying frame. If that spiritual warmth, those holy impressions we carry from God in one duty, were but preserved to kindle another duty, it would be of marvellous advantage to keep the heart intent and serious with God.

To this purpose those intermediate ejaculations, betwixt stated and solemn duties, are of most sweet and excellent use; by these, one

duty is as it were linked to another, and so the soul as it were, wraps up itself in a chain of duties. That Christian seldom misses his mark in solemn duty, that shoots up many of these darts in the intervals of duty; it is an excellent commendation Christ bestows upon the spouse, *‘Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honey-comb, Cant. iv. 11.’* Upon which text one gives this sweet note, the honey-comb drops actually but sometimes, but it always hangs full of sweet drops, ready to fall; if our ejaculations were more, our lamentations would be fewer.

*6<sup>th</sup> Help.* Endeavor to engage and raise thy affections to God in duty, if thou wouldst have thy distractions cured.

A dropping eye and a melting heart, are seldom troubled as others are upon this account. When the soul is intent about any work, it gathers in its strength and bends all its thoughts about it; and when it is deeply affected, the affections command the thoughts to go after them; deadness causes distraction, and distraction increases deadness. Could you but look upon duties as the galleries of communion with God, in which you walk with God, where your soul might be filled with those ravishing and matchless delights that are in his presence, your soul would not offer to stir from there.

It is with the heart in duty, as it is with those that dig for gold ore; they try here, and finding none, they try there, and go from place to place, till at last they hit upon the rich vein, and there they sit down. If thy heart could but once hit the rich vein in duty, it would dwell and abide there with delight and constancy, *‘O how I love thy Law, it is my meditation day and night! Psal. cxix. 97.’* The soul could dwell day and night upon its knees, when once its delights, love, and desires are engaged. What is the reason your hearts are so shuffling, especially in secret duties? Why are you ready to be gone, almost as soon as you are come into the presence of God? But because your affections are not engaged.

*7<sup>th</sup> Help.* Mourn over the matter to God, and call in assistance from Heaven, when vain thoughts assault thy heart in duty.

When the messenger of Satan buffeted Paul by wicked injections, as is supposed, he Goes to God and mourns over it before him, *2 Cor. xii. 8.* Never slight wandering thoughts in duty as small



matters, follow every vain thought with a deep sigh, turn thee to God with such words as these, “*Lord, I came hither to speak with thee, and here a busy devil, and a vain heart, conspiring together have set upon me. O my God ! What an heart have I ! Shall I never wait upon thee without distraction ? When shall I enjoy an hour of free communion with thee ? Help me my God this once, do but display thy glory before mine eyes and my heart shall quickly be recovered : thou know-est I came hither to enjoy thee, and shall I go away without thee ? See how the heart of thy poor child works toward thee ! Strives to get near thee but cannot : My heart is aground, come thou north-wind, and blow thou south-wind. O for a fresh gale now from thy Spirit, to set my affections afloat !*” Couldst thou but affectionately bewail thy distractions to God, thou might obtain help and deliverance from them ; He would say to Satan, and thine imperious lusts as Ahasuerus said of Haman, ‘*What ? Will he force the queen before my face ? Who are these, that set upon my child in my work, and presence ?*’

8<sup>th</sup> Help. Look upon the success and sweetness of thy duties, as very much depending upon the keeping of thy heart close with God in them.

These two things, the success, and sweetness of duty are as dear to the Christian as his two eyes ; and both of these must necessarily be lost, if the heart be lost in duty, *Job xxxv. 13. ‘Surely God heareth not vanity, neither doth the Almighty regard it:’* The promise is made to an heart engaged, *Jer. xxix. 31. ‘Then shall ye seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.’* Well then, when thou findest thy heart under the power of deadness and distraction, say to thy soul, “*What do I lose by a careless heart now ! My praying seasons are the choicest parts, the golden spots of all my time ; could I but get up this heart with God, I might now obtain such mercies as would be matter for a song to all eternity.*”

9<sup>th</sup> Help. Look upon it as a great discovery of the sincerity, or hypocrisy of your hearts as you find them careful or careless in this matter.

Nothing will alarm an upright heart more than this : ‘*What, shall I give way to a customary wandering of the heart from God ?*

*Shall the spot of the hypocrite appear upon my soul ? They indeed can move on in the round of duty, never regarding the frames of their hearts, Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. But shall I do so ? When they ome into the presence chamber, and the king is not there, they can bow to an empty chair. O never let me be satisfied with empty duties ! Never let me take my leave of a duty until mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.’*

10<sup>th</sup> Help. Lastly, it will be of special use to keep thine heart with God in duties, to consider what influence all thy duties have into thy eternity.

These are your seed times, and what you sow in your duties in this world, you must look to reap the fruits of it in another world, *Gal. vi. 7, 8. ‘If you sow to the flesh, of that you shall reap corruption, but if to the Spirit, life everlasting.’* O my soul, answer seriously, wouldst thou be willing to reap the fruit of vanity in the world to come ? Darest thou say, when thy thoughts are roving to the ends of the earth, when you scarcely know what you say or hear, “*Now Lord I am sowing to the Spirit, now I am providing and laying up for eternity, now I am seeking for glory, honor, and immortality, now I am striving to enter in at the straight gate, and now taking the kingdom of heaven by an holy violence ?*” O such a consideration as this, should make the multitude of vain thoughts that press in upon thy heart in duty, to fly seven ways before it. And thus I have shown you how to keep your hearts in the time of duty..

7<sup>th</sup> Season. The seventh season, calling for more than common diligence to keep the heart, is, *when we receive injuries and abuses from men ;* such is the depravity and corruption of man in his fallen state, that one man has become as a wolf, a tyger to another : they are, as the prophet complains, *Hab. i. 14, ‘As the fishes of the sea, and as the creepingthings that have no ruler over them ;’* and as wicked men are cruel and oppressive one to another, so they conspire together to abuse and wrong the people of God, as the prophet complains, *ver. 18. ‘The wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he.’* Now when we are thus abused and wronged, it is hard to keep the heart from revengeful motions ; to make it meekly and quietly, to commit the

cause to Him that judgeth righteously ; to exercise no other affection but pity towards them that abuse us. Surely the spirit that is in us lusteth to revenge, but it must not be so ; you have choice helps in the gospel to keep down your hearts from such sinful motions against your enemies, and to sweeten your embittered spirits ; the seventh case therefore shall be this.

7<sup>th</sup> Case. How a Christian may keep his heart from revengeful motions, under the greatest injuries and abuses from men ?

The gospel indeed allows a liberty to vindicate our innocency, and assert our rights ; but not to vent our corruptions, and invade God's right ; when therefore you find your heart begin to be inflamed by revengeful motions, presently reflect on the following remedies, and the first is this.

1<sup>st</sup> Remedy. Urge upon thy heart the severe prohibitions of revenge by the law of God. Remember that it is forbidden fruit, how pleasing and luscious soever it is to our vitiated appetites. O saith nature revenge is sweet : O but saith God, the effects thereof shall be bitter. How plainly hath God interdicted this pleasing sin, *Prov. xx. 22. 'Say not, I will recompense evil.'* *Prov. xxiv. 29. 'Say not, I will do so to him, as he hath done to me.'* *Rom. xii. 17, 'Recompense to no man evil for evil :* and ver. 19. *'Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath.'* Nay, that is not all, but *Prov. xxv. 21. 'If thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink.'* The word feed him, as critics observe, signifies to feed cheerfully and tenderly, as birds do their young : The Scripture is a great friend to the peace and tranquility of humane societies, which can never be preserved, if revenge be not deposed : it was wont to be an argument urged by the Christians to prove their religion to be supernatural and pure, that it forbids revenge, which is so sweet to nature ; and verily it is a thousand pities such an argument should be lost. Well then, awe your hearts with the authority of God in these Scriptures ; and when carnal reason saith *'Mine enemy deserves to be hated ;'* let conscience reply, *'But doth God deserve to be disobeyed ? Thus, and thus hath he done, and so hath he wronged me ; But what hath God done that I should wrong him ? If he be so bold to break the peace, shall I be so wicked to break the precept ? If he fears not to wrong me, shall I not fear to wrong God ?'* O let the

fear of God's threatenings repress such sinful motions.

2<sup>nd</sup> Remedy. Set before your eyes the most eminent patterns of meekness and forgiveness, that your souls may fall in love with it.

This is the way to cut off the common pleas of the flesh for revenge ; as thus, *'No man would bear such an affront ;'* yes, suh and such have borne as bad, and worse. *'I shall be reckoned a coward, a fool, if I pass by this ;'* no matter, as long as I follow the examples of the wisest and most holy men ; never did any suffer more and greater abuses from men than Christ did, and never did any carry it more peaceably and forgivingly, *Isa. liii. 7. 'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth ; he is brought as lamb to the slaughter, &c.'* This pattern the Apostle sets before you for the imitation, *1 Pet. ii. 21-23. 'For even hereunto are ye called, because Christ also suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow his steps ; who when he was reviled , reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.'* To be of a meek forgiving spirit is Christ-like, God-like, *'then shall you be the children of your father which is in heaven, for he maketh the sun to rise upon the evil, and upon the good, and sendeth rain upon the just, and on the unjust. Mat. v. 46.'* How eminent also did this spirit of Christ rest upon his Apostles, never were there such men upon earth for true excellency of spirit. None abused more, or suffered their abuses better : *'Being reviled (say they) we bless, being persecuted we suffer it, being defamed we entreat. 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.'*

Mr. Calvin, though a quick spirit, yet had attained such a degree of the Christ-like forgiveness, that when Luther had used some opprobrious language of him, the good man said no more but this, although he should call me the devil, yet will I acknowledge him to be an eminent servant of God.

I have often heard it reported of holy Mr. Dod, that one enraged at his close convincing doctrine, picked a quarrel with him, and smote him on the face and dashed out two of his teeth, that meek servant of Christ spit out the teeth and blood into his hand, and said, *"See there, you have knocked out two of my teeth, and that without any just provocation ; but on condition I might do your soul good, I would give you leave to knock out all the rest."* Here is the excellency of the

Christian spirit, above all the attainments of moral heathens : although they were excellent at many other things, yet they could never attain this forgiving spirit ; *'it is the first office of justice (said Tully) to hurt no body, unless provoked by an injury.'* Strive then for this excellency of spirit, which is the proper excellency of Christians ; do some singular thing that others cannot do, and then you will have a testimony in their consciences : when Moses out-did the magicians, they were forced to confess the finger of God in that business.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Remedy.* Consider well the character of the person that hath wronged thee. - He is a good man, or a wicked man that hath done thee the injury. If he is a good man, there is light and tenderness in his conscience, and that will bring him at last to a sense of the evil he hath done ; however Christ hath forgiven him greater injuries than these, and why shouldest not thou ? Will Christ upbraid him with any of those wrongs done to him ? He frankly forgive them all ; and will thou take him by the throat, for some petty abuse he hath done to thee?

Or is he a wicked man ? If so, truly you have more need to exercise pity than revenge towards him, and that upon two accounts :

*1<sup>st</sup>.* He is beside himself, so indeed is every unconverted sinner, Luke xv.17. Should you go into Bedlam and there hear one rail on you , another mock you, and a third threaten you, would you say you would be revenged on them : Alas, poor creatures, they are out of their wits, and know not what they do.

*2<sup>nd</sup>.* There is a day coming, if they repent not, when they will have more misery than you can find in your hearts to wish them. You need not study revenge : God's vengeance sleepeth not, and will shortly take place upon them ; and is not that enough ? Have they not an eternity of misery coming ? If they repent not, this must be the portion of their cup : and if ever they do repent, they will be ready to make you reparation.

*4<sup>th</sup> Remedy.* Keep down thy heart by this consideration, that by *revenge thou canst but satisfy a lust, but by forgiveness thou shalt conquer a lust.*

Suppose, by revenge thou shouldest destroy one enemy; I will show thee how by forgiving, thou shalt conquer three ; thine own lust,

the devil's temptation, and thine enemy's heart ; and is not this a more glorious conquest ? If by revenge you overcome your enemy, yet (as Bernard saith) Unhappy victory, when by overcoming another man, thou art overcome by thine own corruption ; but this way you may obtain a glorious conquest indeed. What an honorable victory did David obtain over Saul, *'And it came to pass when David had made an end of speaking these words, that Saul lifted up his voice and wept ; and said unto David, thou art more righteous than I'* ; 1 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17.

It must be a very disingenuous nature indeed, upon which meekness and forgiveness will not work ; a stony heart which this fire will not melt : to this applies, *'if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head ;'* Prov. xxv. 21. Some will have it a self-punishing fire; but others, an heart-melting fire. To be sure, it will either melt his heart, or aggravate his misery. Augustine thinks that Stephen's prayer for his enemies, was the great means of Paul's conversion.

*5<sup>th</sup> Remedy.* Seriously propose this question to thy own heart, *'Have I got any good by the wrongs and injuries received, or have I not ?'* If they have done you no good, turn the revenge upon yourselves. Oh that I should have a bad heart, that can get no good out of such troubles. O that my spirit should be so unlike to Christ. The patience and meekness of other Christians turned all the injuries thrown at them into precious stones ; the spirits of others have been raised in blessing to God when they have been loaded with reproaches by the world ; they have bound them as an ornament to their necks. *'I could even be proud of it (said Luther) that I have a bad name among wicked men.'* To the same purpose Jerome expressed himself ; *"I thank my God (said he) that I am worthy to be hated of the world."* Thus their hearts were taught by the injuries to magnify God, and bless him for them ; if it work contrary with me, I have cause enough to be filled with self-complacency.

If you have got any good by them, if the reproaches and wrongs which you have received, have made you search your hearts the more, watch your ways the more narrowly ; if their wronging you, have made you see how you have wronged God, then let me say for them as Paul

did say for himself, pray forgive them their wrong.

What ? Can you not find an heart to forgive one that has been instrumental of so much good to you, that's strange ! What though they meant it for evil, yet God hath turned it to good, you have no more reason to rage against the instrument, than he who had received a wound from his enemy, which only break and let out that imposthume, which otherwise would have been his death.

*6<sup>th</sup> Remedy.* It is of excellent use to keep your heart from revenge, to look up and eye the first cause by which all our troubles are ordered.

This will calm and sweeten our spirit quickly ; never did a wicked tongue try the patience of a saint more than David was tried by that railing Shimei ; yet the spirit of this good man was not at all poisoned by revenge, though he goes along cursing and casting stones at him all the way ; yea, though Abishai offered him, if he pleased, the head of that enemy ; but the king said, "*What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah ! So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, curse David ; Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?*" It may be, God uses him as his rod to lash me, because my sin made his enemies blaspheme him ; and shall I be angry with the rod ? How irrational were that ? Thus also was it that quieted Job ; he doth not rail, and vow revenge upon the Chaldeans and Sabeans, but eyes God as the orderer of those troubles, and is quiet, "*The Lord hath taken away, blessed be his name,*" Job i. 21.

*Obj.* But you will say, '*To turn aside the right of a man, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not,*' Lam. iii. 36.

*Ans.* True, but though it fall not under his approving, yet it doth under his permitting will, and there is great argument for quiet submission in that ; nay, he hath not only the permitting, but the ordering of all those troubles ; did we see more of an holy God, we should shew less of a corrupt nature in such trivials.

*7<sup>th</sup> Remedy.* Consider how you daily wrong God, and you will not be so easily inflamed with revenge against others that have wronged you.

You are daily wronging and grieving God, yet he hears, forgives, and will not take vengeance upon you ; and will you be so quick in revenging yourselves upon others ? O what a sharp and terrible rebuke is that *Matt. xviii. 32, 33, 'O thou wicked and slothful servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me ; shouldst thou not also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ?'* None should be filled so with bowels of pity, forbearance and mercy, to such as wrong them, as those should be that have experienced the riches of mercy themselves ; methinks the mercy of God to us should melt our very bowels into mercy them-selves : It is impossible we can be so cruel to others except we forget how kind Christ hath been to us ; if kindness cannot work, methinks fear should : '*If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses,*' *Matt. vi. 15.*

*8<sup>th</sup> Remedy.* Lastly, let the consideration of day of the Lord which draweth nigh, withhold your hearts from anticipating it by acts of revenge.

Why are you so quick ? Is not the Lord at hand, to avenge all his abused servants ? '*Be patient therefore my brethren, unto the coming of the Lord : Behold the husbandman waiteth, &c. Be ye also patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh ; grudge not one against another, Brethren, lest ye be condemned. Behold, the Judge standeth at the door,*' *Jam. v.7, 8, 9.* This text affords three arguments against revenge.

1. The Lord's near approach
2. The example of the husbandman's patience
3. The danger we draw upon ourselves by anticipating God's judgment : Vengeance is mine saith the Lord ; he will distribute justice more equally and impartially than you can ; they that believe they have a God to right them, will not so much wrong themselves as to avenge their own wrongs.

*Objection 1.* But flesh and blood are not able to bear such abuses.

*Solution 1.* If you resolve to consult flesh and blood in such cases and do no more than but what that will enable you to do, never pretend to religion.

*Objection 2.* But if I pack up such abuses, I shall be reckoned a fool, and everyone will trample upon me.

*Solution 2.* You may be reckoned so among fools, but God and good men will account it your wisdom, and the excellency of your spirit. It must be a base spirit indeed that will trample upon a meek and forgiving Christian : and thus learn to keep your hearts from revenge under all your provocations.

*8<sup>th</sup> Season.* The *next season* in which we are in danger of losing our hearts, is *when we meet with great crosses and provocations*, then sinful passion is apt to transport the heart ; it is the fault of many good men to be of hasty and quick spirits when provoked, though they dare not concoct anger into malice ; for that would be a note of wickedness, yet are they very incident to sudden anger, which is a sign of weakness. Beza in the life of Calvin observes, that he was of a keen and hasty spirit ; and he that writes of great Cameron, saith that his anger was soon stirred towards his near and familiar friends, but that he would easily depose it, and acknowledge his weakness ; alas, when provocations, and trials of our patience come, we know not what spirits we are of. The eighth case therefore is this.

*8<sup>th</sup> Case.* How the heart may be kept meek and patient under great crosses and provocations.

There are three sorts of anger ; natural, holy, and sinful anger.

*1<sup>st</sup>. Natural anger*, which is nothing else but the motion of the irascible appetite towards an offensive object ; and this in itself is no sin, they are prepassions rather than passions ; the infelicities rather than the sins of nature, as Jerome calls them ; reason, (saith Plutarch), is the driver, the soul is the chariot, and the two horses, that draw it on in all its motions, are the concupiscence and irascible appetites ; whilst these are rightly managed by reason, they are not only lawful, but very useful to the soul. God would not have us be stupid and insensible, though he would have us to be meek and patient, *Eph.* iv. 26.

*2<sup>nd</sup>. Holy anger*, which is a pure flame, kindled by an heavenly spark of love to God, and in Scripture is called zeal, which is, (as one saith), the dagger which love draws in God's quarrel. Such was Lot's against the Sodomites, and that of Moses against the idolatrous Isrealites. When Servetus condemned Zwinglius for his harshness, his answer was, in other cases I will be mild, but in the cause of Christ, not

so. That which the world calls moderation and mildness here, is in God's account stupidity and cowardice ; neither of these are that which I am now persuading you to keep your hearts against.

But *3<sup>rd</sup>*, *there is sinful passion*, that's the thing which angers you. Now anger becomes sinful when it is either causeless, *Mat.* v. 22, or excessive, and that either in measure or time, exceeding the value of the impulsive cause, be it more transient or abiding , yet it is a sin and is matter of humiliation before God. Now the means to keep the heart from these provocations are these.

*1<sup>st</sup> means.* Get low and humble thoughts of yourselves, and then you will have meek spirits, and a peaceable deportment towards others.

The humble, is ever the patient man. Pride is the root of passion ; a lofty, will be a surly spirit. Bladders blown up with wind will not lie close together, but prick them, and you may pack a thousand in a small room, '*Only by pride cometh contention,*' *Prov.* xiii. 10. When we overrate ourselves, then we think that we are unworthily treated by others, and that provokes ; and here, (by the way), take notice of one great benefit of acquaintance with your own hearts, even the calming of your spirits. Christian, methinks you shouldst know so much of thyself, that it be impossible any should lay thee lower, or have baser thoughts of thee than thou hast of thyself. Some render the original of that text, Thus the proud man is as he that transgresseth by wine ; *Heb.* ii. 5 - and drunkards you know are quarrelsome. O get more humility, and that will bring you more peace.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Means.* Be often sweetening your spirits in communion with God, and they will not be easily embittered with wrath towards men.

A quiet conscience never produced an unquiet conversation ; the peace of God doth rule in the heart, as an umpire in appeasing strifes ; wrath and strife are hugely opposite to the frame and temper of a spiritual heart, because consistent with the delight and contentment of that dove-like spirit, which loves a sedate and quiet breast. Oh, saith a soul that feeds upon the sweet communion of the spirit, shall the sparkles of provocation now catch in my passions, and raise such a disturbance in my soul as will offend and drive away the Comforter

from me ? This is so effectual a remedy against passion, that I durst almost venture in a Christian of a hasty nature to make long-suffering a sign of communion with God. Seest thou a Christian quiet and calm under provocations, it is likely his soul feeds upon such sweetness in God as he is loathe to leave : and on the other side, seest thou such a Christian turbulent and clamorous, doubtless all is not well within ; his spirit is like a bone out of joint, which cannot move without pain and trouble.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Means.* Get due apprehension of the evil nature of sinful anger ; anger is the fever of the soul ; it is the elipse of reason.

The effects of it are very sad.

(1). *It grieves the Spirit of God, Eph. iv. 30.* Banishes him from the breast in which it rages and tumultuates. God is the God of peace; his presence and comforts are only enjoyed in a calm ; it is a golden note one gives upon the fore-mentioned text - God doth not usually bless with peace of conscience such as make no conscience of peace

(2). It gives advantage to the devil, *Eph. iv. 26, 27.* Satan is an angry and discontented spirit, and finds no rest but in restless hearts; he lives like the salamander, in fires of contention ; he bestirs himself when the spirits are in commotion ; sometimes he fills the heart with revengeful thoughts, sometimes he fills the lips and inflames the tongue with indecent language ; even a meek Moses sometimes spake unadvisedly with his lips.

(3). It uptunes the spirit for duty ; upon this account the Apostle dissuades husbands and wives from jarring carriages and contentions, that their prayers be not hindered, *1 Pet. iii. 7.* All acts of worship must be suitable to the object of worship ; but God is the God peace, the God of love.

(4). To mention no more, it disparages the Christian religion. How would Plato and Pythagoras shame us if they were now living : Christ was a Lamb for meekness, and doth it become his followers to be like lions ? O keep your hearts, or you will at once lose, not only your own peace, but the credit of religion.

*4<sup>th</sup> Means.* Consider how desirable it is for a Christian to overcome his evil propensities. How much more present happiness it affords; how much better it is in every respect to mortify and subdue unholy feelings, than to give way to them. When upon your deathbed you come calmly to review your life, how comfortable will it be to reflect on the conquest which you have made over the depraved feelings of your heart. It was a memorable saying of Valentinian the emperor, when he was about to die: "*Amongst all my conquests, there is but one that now comforts me.*" Being asked what that was, he answered, "*I have overcome my worst enemy, my own sinful heart!*"

*5<sup>th</sup> Means.* Shame yourself, by contemplating the character of those who have been most eminent for meekness and submission. Above all, compare your temper with the Spirit of Christ. "*Learn of me,*" saith he, "*for I am meek and lowly.*" It is said of Calvin and Ursin, though both of choleric natures, that they had so imbibed and cultivated the meekness of Christ as not to utter an unbecoming word under the greatest provocations. And even many of the heathens have manifested great moderation and forbearance under their severest afflictions. Is it not a shame and a reproach that you should be outdone by them ?

*6<sup>th</sup> Means.* Avoid every thing which is calculated to irritate your feelings. It is true spiritual valour to keep as far as we can out of sin's way. If you can but avoid the excitements to impetuous and rebellious feelings, or check them in their first beginnings, you will have but little to fear. The first workings of common sins are comparatively weak, they gain their strength by degrees; but in times of trial the motions of sin are strongest at first, the unsubdued temper breaks out suddenly and violently. But if you resolutely with stand it at first, it will yield and give you the victory.

IX. The *ninth season* wherein the greatest diligence and skill are necessary to keep the heart, is *the hour of temptation*, when Satan besets the Christian's heart, and takes the unwary by surprise. To keep the heart at such times, is not less a mercy than a duty. Few Christians are so skilful in detecting the fallacies, and repelling the arguments by

which the adversary incites them to sin, as to come off safe and whole in these encounters. Many eminent saints have smarted severely for their want of watchfulness and diligence at such times. How then may a Christian keep his heart from yielding to temptation ? There are several principal ways in which the adversary insinuates temptation, and urges compliance:

1. Satan suggests that here is pleasure to be enjoyed; the temptation is presented with a smiling aspect and an enticing voice: *“What, are you so dull and phlegmatic as not to feel the powerful charms of pleasure ? Who can withhold himself from such delights ?”* Reader, you may be rescued from the danger of such temptations by repelling the proposal of pleasure. It is urged that the commission of sin will afford you pleasure. Suppose this were true, will the accusing and condemning rebukes of conscience and the flannel of hell be pleasant too ? Is there pleasure in the scourges of conscience ? If so, why did Peter weep so bitterly ? Why did David cry out of broken bones ? You hear what is said of the pleasure of sin, and have you not read what David said of the effects of it ? *‘Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore; there is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin,’* etc. If you yield to temptation, you must feel such inward distress on account of it, or the miseries of hell. But why should the pretended pleasure of sin allure you, when you know that unspeakably more real pleasure will arise from the mortification than can arise from the commission of sin. Will you prefer the gratification of some unhallowed passion, with the deadly poison which it will leave behind, to that sacred pleasure which arises from hearing and obeying God, complying with the dictates of conscience, and maintaining inward peace ? Can sin afford any such delight as he feels who, by resisting temptation, has manifested the sincerity of his heart, and obtained evidence that he fears God, loves holiness, and hates sin ?

2. The secrecy with which you may commit sin is made use of to induce compliance with temptation. The tempter insinuates that this indulgence will never disgrace you among men, for no one will know it. But recollect yourself. Does not God behold you ? Is not the divine

presence everywhere ? What if you might hide your sin from the eyes of the world, you cannot hide it from God. No darkness nor shadow of death can screen you from his inspection. Besides have you no reverence for yourself ? Can you do that by yourself which you dare not have others observe ? Is not your conscience as a thousand witnesses ? Even a heathen could say, *“When thou art tempted to commit sin, fear thyself without any other witness.”*

3. The prospect of worldly advantage often enforces temptation. It is suggested, *“Why should you be so nice and scrupulous ? Give yourself a little liberty, and you may better your condition: now is your time.”* This is a dangerous temptation, and must be promptly resisted. Yielding to such a temptation will do your soul more injury than any temporal acquisition can possibly do you good. And what would it profit you, if you should gain the whole world and lose your own soul ? What can be compared with the value of your spiritual interests ? Or what can at all compensate for the smallest injury of them ?

4. Perhaps the smallness of the sin is urged as a reason why you may commit it; thus : *‘It is but a little one, a small matter, a trifle; who would stand upon such niceties ?’* But is the Majesty of heaven little too ? If you commit this sin you will offend a great God. Is there any little hell to torment little sinners in ? No ; the least sinners in hell are full of misery. There is great wrath treasured up for those whom the world regard as little sinners. But the less the sin, the less the inducement to commit it. Will you provoke God for a trifle ? Will you destroy your peace, wound your conscience, and grieve the Spirit, all for nothing ? What madness is this !

5. An argument to enforce temptation is sometimes drawn from the mercy of God and the hope of pardon ; God is merciful, he will pass by this as an infirmity, he will not be severe to mark it. But stay: where do you find a promise of mercy to presumptuous sinners ? Involuntary reprisals and lamented infirmities may be pardoned, *‘but the soul that doth aught presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.’* If God is

a being of so much mercy, how can you affront him ? How can you make so glorious an attribute as the divine mercy an occasion of sin ? Will you wrong him because he is good ? Rather let his goodness lead you to repentance, and keep you from transgression.

6. Sometimes Satan encourages to the commission of sin, from the examples of holy men. Thus and thus they sinned, and were restored; therefore you may commit this sin, and yet be a saint and be saved. Such suggestions must be instantly repelled. If good men have committed sins similar to that with which you are beset, did any good man ever sin upon such ground and from such encouragement as is here presented ? Did God cause their examples to be recorded for your imitation, or for your warning ? Are they not set up as beacons that you may avoid the rocks upon which they split ? Are you willing to feel what they felt for sin ? Dare you follow them in sin, and plunge yourself into such distress and danger as they incurred ? Reader, in these ways learn to keep your heart in the hour of temptation.

*X. The time of doubting and of spiritual darkness* constitutes another season when it is very difficult to keep the heart. When the light and comfort of the divine presence is withdrawn; when the believer, from the prevalence of indwelling sin in one form or other, is ready to renounce his hopes, to infer desperate conclusions with respect to himself, to regard his former comforts as vain delusions, and his professions as hypocrisy; at such a time much diligence is necessary to keep the heart from despondency. The Christian's distress arises from his apprehension of his spiritual state, and in general he argues against his possessing true religion, either from his having relapsed into the same sins from which he had formerly been recovered with shame and sorrow; or from the sensible declining of his affections from God ; or from the strength of his affections toward creature enjoyments ; or from his enlargement in public, while he is often confined and barren in private duties; or from some horrible suggestions of Satan, with which his soul is greatly perplexed ; or, lastly, from God's silence and seeming denial of his long depending prayers. Now in order to the establishment and support of the heart under these circumstances, it is necessary that you be acquainted with some general truths which have

a tendency to calm the trembling and doubting soul; and that you be rightly instructed with regard to the above-mentioned causes of disquiet. Let me direct your attention to the following general truths :

1. Every appearance of hypocrisy does not prove the person who manifests it to be a hypocrite. You should carefully distinguish between the appearance and the predominance of hypocrisy. There are remains of deceitfulness in the best hearts; this was exemplified in David and Peter, but the prevailing frame of their hearts being upright, they were not denominated hypocrites for their conduct.

2. We ought to regard what can be said in our favor, as well as what may be said against us. It is the sin of upright persons sometimes, to exercise an unreasonable severity against themselves. They do not impartially consider the state of their souls. To make their state appear better than it really is, indeed is the damning sin of self-flattering hypocrites; and to make their state appear worse than it really is, is the sin and folly of some good persons. But why should you be such an enemy to your own peace ? Why read over the evidences of God's love to your soul, as a man does a book which he intends to confute ? Why do you study evasions, and turn off those comforts which are due to you ?

3. Every thing which may be an occasion of grief to the people of God, is not a sufficient ground for their questioning the reality of their religion. Many things may trouble, which ought not to stumble you. If upon every occasion you should call in question all that had ever been wrought upon you, your life would be made up of doubting and fears, and you could never attain that settled inward peace, and live that life of praise and thankfulness which the Gospel requires.

4. The soul is not at all times in a suitable state to pass a right judgment upon itself. It is peculiarly unqualified for this in the labour of desertion or temptation. Such seasons must be improved rather for watching and resisting, than for judging and determining.

5. Whatever be the ground of one's distress, it should drive him



to, not from God. Suppose you have sinned thus and so, or that you have been thus long and sadly deserted, yet you have no right to infer that you ought to be discouraged, as if there was no help for you in God. When you have well digested these truths, if your doubts and distress remain, consider what is now to be offered:

(1). Are you ready to conclude that you have no part in the favor of God, because you are visited with some extraordinary affliction ? If so, do you then rightly conclude that great trials are tokens of God's hatred ? Does the Scripture teach this ? And dare you infer the same with respect to all who have been as much or more afflicted than yourself ? If the argument is good in your case, it is good in application to theirs, and more conclusive with respect to them, in proportion as their trials were greater than yours. Woe then to David, Job, Paul, and all who have been afflicted as they were ! But had you passed along in quietness and prosperity; had God withheld those chastisements with which he ordinarily visits his people, would you not have had far more reason for doubts and distress than you now have ?

(2). Do you rashly infer that the Lord has no love to you, because he has withdrawn the light of his countenance? Do you imagine your state to be hopeless, because it is dark and uncomfortable? Be not hasty in forming this conclusion. If any of the dispensations of God to his people will bear a favourable as well as a harsh construction, why should they not be construed in the best sense? And may not God have a design of love rather than of hatred in the dispensation under which you mourn? May he not depart for a season, without departing for ever? You are not the first that have mistaken the design of God in withdrawing himself. *'Zion saith, the Lord hath forsaken me, my Lord hath forgotten me.'* But was it so? What saith the answer of God? *'Can a woman forget her sucking child?'* etc.

But do you sink down under the apprehension that the evidences of a total and final desertion are discoverable in your experience ? Have you then lost your conscientious tenderness with regard to sin ? And are you inclined to forsake God ? If so, you have reason indeed to be alarmed. But if your conscience is tenderly alive; if you are resolved to cleave to the Lord ; if the language of your heart is, I cannot forsake God, I cannot live without his presence ; though he slay me, yet will I trust in him : then you have reason to hope that he

will visit you again. It is by these exercises that he still maintains his interest in you.

Once more. Are sense and feelings suitable to judge of the dispensations of God by ? Can their testimony be safely relied on ? Is it safe to argue thus : *'If God had any love for my soul, I should feel it now as well as in former times; but I cannot feel it, therefore it is gone ?'* May you not as well conclude, when the sun is invisible to you, that he has ceased to exist ? Read Isaiah 1:10.

Now if there is nothing in the divine dealings with you which is a reasonable ground of your despondency and distress, let us inquire what there is in your own conduct for which you should be so cast down:

(i). Have you committed sins from which you were formerly recovered with shame and sorrow ? And do you thence conclude that you sin allowedly and habitually, and that your oppositions to sin were hypocritical ? But do not too hastily give up all for lost. Is not your repentance and care renewed as often as you commit sin ? Is it not the sin itself which troubles you, and is it not true, that the oftener you sin the more you are distressed ? It is not so in customary sinning; of which Bernard excellently discourses thus : *'When a man accustomed to restrain, sins grievously, it seems insupportable to him, yea he seems to descend alive into hell. In process of time it seems not insupportable, but heavy, and between insupportable and heavy there is no small descent. Next, such sinning becomes light, his conscience smites but faintly, and he regards not her rebukes. Then he is not only insensible to his guilt, but that which was bitter and displeasing has become in some degree sweet and pleasant. Now it is made a custom, and not only pleases, but pleases habitually. At length custom becomes nature ; he cannot be dissuaded from it, but defends and pleads for it.'* This is allowed and customary sinning, this is the way of the wicked. But is not your way the contrary of this ?

(ii). Do you apprehend a decline of your affections from God and from spiritual subjects ? This may be your case, and yet there may be hope. But possibly you are mistaken with regard to this. There are many things to be learnt in Christian experience; it has relation to a great variety of subjects. You may now be learning what it is very necessary for you to know as a Christian. Now, what if you are not

sensible of so lively affections, of such ravishing views as you had at first; may not your piety be growing more solid and consistent, and better adapted to practical purposes ? Does it follow from your not always being in the same frame of mind, or from the fact that the same objects do not at all times excite the same feelings, that you have no true religion ? Perhaps you deceive yourself by looking forward to what you would be, rather than contemplating what you are, compared with what you once were.

(iii). If the strength of your love to creature-enjoyments is the ground of desperate conclusions respecting yourself, perhaps you argue thus: *'I fear that I love the creature more than God ; if so, I have not true love to God. I sometimes feel stronger affections toward earthly comforts than I do toward heavenly objects ; therefore my soul is not upright within me.'* If, indeed, you love the creature for itself, if you make it your end, and religion but a means, then you conclude rightly; for this is incompatible with supreme love to God. But may not a man love God more ardently and unchangeably than he does anything, or all things else, and yet, when God is not the direct object of his thoughts, may he not be sensible of more violent affection for the creature than he has at that time for God ? As rooted malice indicates a stronger hatred than sudden though more violent passion; so we must judge of our love, not by a violent motion of it now and then, but by the depth of its root and the constancy of its exercise. Perhaps your difficulty results from bringing your love to some foreign and improper test. Many persons have feared that when brought to some eminent trial they should renounce Christ and cleave to the creature ; but when the trial came, Christ was everything, and the world as nothing in their esteem. Such were the fears of some martyrs whose victory was complete. But you may expect divine assistance only at the time of, and in proportion to your necessity. If you would try your love, see whether you are willing to forsake Christ now.

(iv). Is the want of that enlargement in private which you find in public exercises an occasion of doubts and fears ? Consider then whether there are not some circumstances attending public duties which are peculiarly calculated to excite your feelings and elevate your mind, and which cannot affect you in private. If so, your exercises in secret, if performed faithfully and in a suitable manner, may be

profitable, though they have not all the characteristics of those in public. If you imagine that you have spiritual enlargement and enjoyment in public exercises while you neglect private duties, doubtless you deceive yourself. Indeed *if you live in the neglect of secret duties, or are careless about them, you have great reason to fear.* But if you regularly and faithfully perform them, it does not follow that they are vain and worthless, or that they are not of great value, because they are not attended with so much enlargement as you sometimes find in public. And what if the Spirit is pleased more highly to favor you with his gracious influence in one place and at one time than another, should this be a reason for murmuring and unbelief, or for thank-fulness ?

(v). The vile or blasphemous suggestions of Satan sometimes occasion great perplexity and distress. They seem to lay open an abyss of corruption in the heart, and to say there can be no grace here. But there may be grace in the heart where such thoughts are injected, though not in the heart which consents to and cherishes them. Do you then abhor and oppose them ? Do you utterly refuse to give up yourself to their influence, and strive to keep holy and reverend thoughts of God, and of all religious objects ? If so, such suggestions are involuntary, and no evidence against your piety.

(vi). Is the seeming denial of your prayers an occasion of despondency ? Are you disposed to say, *"If God had any regard for my soul he would have heard my petitions before now ; but I have no answer from him, and therefore no interest in him ?"* But stay: though God's abhorring and finally rejecting prayer is an evidence that he rejects the person who prays, yet, dare you conclude that he has rejected you, because an answer to your prayers is delayed, or because you do not discover it if granted ? *'May not God bear long with his own elect, that cry unto him day and night?'*

Others have stumbled upon the same ground with you : *'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes : nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplication.'* Now are there not some things in your experience which indicate that your prayers are not rejected, though answer to them is deferred ? Are you not disposed to continue praying though you do not discover an answer ? Are you not disposed still to ascribe righteousness to God, while you consider the cause of his silence as being in yourself ? Thus did David : *"O my God, I cry*

*in the day time, and thou hearest not ; and in the night, and am not silent : but thou art holy,*” etc. Does not the delay of an answer to your prayers excite you to examine your own heart and try your ways, that you may find and remove the difficulty ? If so, you may have reason for humiliation, but not for despair.

Thus I have shown you how to keep your heart in dark and doubting seasons. God forbid that any false heart should encourage itself from these things. It is lamentable, that when we give saints and sinners their proper portions, each is so prone to take up the other's part.

XI. *Another season*, wherein the heart must be kept with all diligence, is *when sufferings for religion are laid upon us*. Blessed is the man who in such a season is not offended in Christ. Now, whatever may be the kind or degree of your sufferings, if they are sufferings for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, spare no diligence to keep your heart. If you are tempted to shrink or waver under them, let what follows help you to repel and to surmount the instigation :

1. What reproach would you cast upon the Redeemer and his religion by deserting him at such a time as this ! You would proclaim to the world, that how much soever you have boasted of the promises. when you are put to the proof you dare hazard nothing upon your faith in them; and this will give the enemies of Christ an occasion to blaspheme. And will you thus furnish the triumphs of the uncircumcised ? Ah, if you did but value the name of Christ as much as many wicked men value their names, you could never endure that his should be exposed to contempt. Will proud dust and ashes hazard death or hell rather than have their names disgraced, and will you endure nothing to maintain the honor of Christ ?

2. Dare you violate your conscience out of complaisance to flesh and blood ? Who will comfort you when your conscience accuses and condemns you ? What happiness can there be in life, liberty or friends when inward peace is taken away ? Consider well what you do.

3. Is not the public interest of Christ and his cause infinitely more important than any interest of your own, and should you not prefer his glory and the welfare of his kingdom before every thing else? Should any temporary suffering, or any sacrifice which you can be called to make, be suffered to come into competition with the honor of his name ?

4. Did the Redeemer neglect your interest and think lightly of you, when for your sake he endured sufferings between which and yours there can be no comparison? Did he hesitate and shrink back? No: *‘He endured the cross, despising the shame.’* And did he with unbroken patience and constancy endure so much for you; and will you flinch from momentary suffering in his cause?

5. Can you so easily cast off the society and the privileges of the saints and go over to the enemy's side ? Are you willing to withhold your support from those who are determined to persevere, and throw your influence in the scale against them ? Rather let your body and soul be rent asunder. *‘If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.’*

6. How can you stand before Christ in the day of judgment, if you desert him now ? *‘He that is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.’* Yet a little while, and the Son of man will come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, to judge the world. He will sit upon the throne of judgment, while all the nations are brought before him. Imagine yourself now to be witnessing the transactions of that day. Behold the wicked; behold the apostates; and hear the consuming sentence which is pronounced upon them, and see them sinking in the gulf of infinite and everlasting woe ! And will you desert Christ now, will you forsake his cause to save a little suffering, or to protract an unprofitable life on earth, and thus expose yourself to the doom of the apostate ? Remember, that if you can silence the remonstrances of conscience now, you cannot hinder the sentence of the Judge then. *By these means keep your heart, that it depart not from the living God.*

XII. The *last season* which I shall mention, in which the heart must be kept with all diligence, is *when we are warned by sickness that our dissolution is at hand*. When the child of God draws nigh to eternity, the adversary makes his last effort; and as he cannot win the soul from God, as he cannot dissolve the bond which unites the soul to Christ, his great design is to awaken fears of death, to fill the mind with aversion and horror at the thoughts of dissolution from the body. Hence, what shrinking from a separation, what fear to grasp death's cold hand, and unwillingness to depart, may sometimes be observed in the people of God. But we ought to die, as well as live, like saints. I shall offer several considerations calculated to help the people of God in time of sickness, to keep their hearts loose from all earthly objects, and cheerfully willing to die:

1. Death is harmless to the people of God; its shafts leave no sting in them. Why then are you afraid that your sickness may be unto death? If you were to die in your sins; if death were to reign over you as a tyrant, to feed upon you as a lion doth upon his prey; if death to you were to be the precursor of hell, then you might reasonably startle and shrink back from it with horror and dismay. But if your sins are blotted out; if Christ has vanquished death in your behalf, so that you have nothing to encounter but bodily pain, and possibly not even that; if death will be to you the harbinger of heaven, why should you be afraid? Why not bid it welcome? It cannot hurt you; it is easy and harmless; it is like putting off your clothes, of taking rest.

2. It may keep your heart from shrinking back, to consider that death is necessary to fit you for the full enjoyment of God. Whether you are willing to die or not, there certainly is no other way to complete the happiness of your soul. Death must do you the kind office to remove this veil of flesh, this animal life which separates you from God, before you can see and enjoy him fully. '*Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.*' And who would not be willing to die for the perfect enjoyment of God? Methinks one should look and sigh, like a prisoner, through the grates of this mortality: "*O, that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest.*" Indeed most men need patience to die; but a saint, who understands

what death will introduce him to, rather needs patience to live. On his deathbed he should often look out and listen to his Lord's coming; and when he perceives his dissolution to be near, he should say, "*The voice of my beloved; behold he cometh, leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills.*"

3. Consider that the happiness of heaven commences immediately after death. *That* happiness will not be deferred till the resurrection; but as soon as death has passed upon you, your soul will be swallowed up in life. When you have once loosed from this shore, you shall be quickly wafted to the shore of a glorious eternity. And can you not say, "*I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ?*" Did the soul and body die together, or did they sleep till the resurrection, as some have fancied, it would have been folly for Paul to desire a dissolution for the enjoyment of Christ; because he would have enjoyed more in the body than he could have enjoyed out of it.

The Scripture speaks of but two ways in which the soul can properly live: viz. by *faith* and *vision*. These two comprehend its present and future existence. Now, if when faith fails, sight should not immediately succeed, what would become of the soul? But the truth on this subject is clearly revealed in Scripture. See Luke 23:3; John 14:3, etc. What a blessed change then will death make in your condition! Rouse up, dying saint, and rejoice; let death do his work, that the angels may conduct your soul to the world of light.

4. It may increase your willingness to die, to reflect that by death God often removes his people out of the way of great troubles and temptations. When some extraordinary calamity is coming upon the world, God sometimes removes his saints out of the way of the evil. Thus Methuselah died the year before the flood; Augustine a little before the sacking of Hippo; Pareus just before the taking of Heidelberg. Luther observes that all the apostles died before the destruction of Jerusalem; and Luther himself died before the wars broke out in Germany. How it may be that by death you will escape some grievous trial, which you could not and need not endure. But if no extraordinary trouble would come upon you in case your life were prolonged, yet God desires by death to relieve you from innumerable

evils and burdens which are inseparable from the present state. Thus you will be delivered from indwelling sin, which is the greatest trouble; from all temptations from whatever source; from bodily tempers and embarrassments; and from all the afflictions and sorrows of this life. The days of your mourning will be ended, and God will wipe away all tears from your eyes. Why then should you not hasten to depart ?

5. If you still linger, like Lot in Sodom, what are your pleas and pretences for a longer life ? Why are you unwilling to die ? Are you concerned for the welfare of your relations ? If so, are you anxious for their temporal support ? Then let the word of God satisfy you : *‘Leave thy fatherless children to me, I will keep them alive, and let thy widows trust in me.’* Luther says, in his last will, *‘Lord, thou hast given me a wife and children, I have nothing to leave them, but I commit them unto thee. O, Father of the fatherless and Judge of widows, nourish, keep and teach them.’*

But are you concerned for the spiritual welfare of your relations? Remember that you cannot convert them, if you should live; and God can make your prayers and counsels effectual when you are dead.

Perhaps you desire to serve God longer in this world. But if he has nothing further for you to do here, why not say with David, *“Here am I, let him do what seemeth him good.”* He is calling you to high or service in heaven, and can accomplish by other hands what you desire to do further here. Do you feel too imperfect to go to heaven ? Consider that you must be imperfect until you die ; your sanctification cannot be complete until you get to heaven.

*“But,”* you say, *“I want assurance; if I had that I could die easily.”* Consider, then, that a hearty willingness to leave all the world to be freed from sin, and to be with God, is the direct way to that desired assurance; no carnal person was ever willing to die upon this ground.

Thus I have shown how the people of God, in the most difficult seasons, may keep their hearts with all diligence. I now proceed to improve and apply the subject :

I. You have seen that the keeping of the heart is the great work of a Christian, in which the very soul and life of religion consists, and without which all other duties are of no value in the sight of God. Hence, to the consternation of hypocrites and formal professors, I infer :

1. That the pains and labours which many persons have undergone in religion are of no value, and will turn to no good account. Many splendid services have been performed by men, which God will utterly reject: they will not stand on record in order to an eternal acceptance, because the performers took no heed to keep their hearts with God. This is that fatal rock on which thousands of vain professors dash and ruin themselves eternally; they are exact about the externals of religion, but regardless of their hearts. O, how many hours have some professors spent in hearing, praying, reading and con-ferring ! And yet, as to the main end of religion, they might as well have sat still and done nothing, the great work, I mean heart-work, being all the while neglected. Tell me, vain professor, when did you shed a tear for the deadness, hardness, unbelief or earthliness of your heart ? And do you think your easy religion can save you ? If so, you must *invert* Christ's words, and say, *“Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to life, and many there be that go in thereat.”* Hear me, ye self-deluding hypocrite ; you who have put off God with heartless duties ; you who have acted in religion as if you had been blessing an idol ; you who could not search your heart, and regulate it, and exercise it in your performances ; how will you abide the coming of the Lord ? how will you hold up your head before him, when he shall say, *“O, you dissembling. false-hearted man ! How could you profess religion ? With what face could you so often tell me that you loved me, when you knew in your conscience that your heart was not with me ?”* O, tremble to think what a fearful judgment it is to be given over to a heedless and careless heart, and then to have religions duties instead of a rattle to quiet and still the conscience !

2. I infer for their humiliation, that unless *the people of God* spend more time and pains about their hearts than they ordinarily do, they are never like to do God much service, or to possess much comfort in this world. I may say of that Christian who is remiss and

careless in keeping his heart, as Jacob said of Reuben, *thou shalt not excel*. It grieves me to see how many Christians there are who live at a poor, low rate, both of service and comfort, and who go up and down dejected and complaining. But how can they expect it should be otherwise, while they live so carelessly ? O, how little of their time is spent in the closet, in searching, humbling, and quickening their hearts!

Christian, you say your heart is dead, and do you wonder that it is, so long as you keep it not with the fountain of life ? If your body had been dieted as your soul has, that would have been dead too. And you may never expect that your heart will be in a better state until you take more pains with it.

O, Christians ! I fear your zeal and strength have run in the wrong chapel ; I fear that most of us may take up the Church's complaint : '*They have made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.*' Two things have eaten up the time and strength of the professors of this generation, and sadly diverted them from heart-work.

*First*: Fruitless controversies, started by Satan, I doubt not for the very purpose of taking us off from practical godliness, to make us puzzle our heads when we should be inspecting our hearts. How little have we regarded the observation: '*It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, and not with meats*, (that is, with disputes and controversies about meats), *which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.*' How much better it is to see men live exactly, than to hear them dispute with subtlety ! These unfruitful questions, how have they rent the churches, wasted time and spirits, and taken Christians off from their main business ! What think you, would it not have been better if the questions agitated among the people of God of late had been such as these: '*How shall a man distinguish the special from the common operations of the Spirit ? How may a soul discern its first backslidings from God ? How may a backsliding Christian recover his first love ? How may the heart be preserved from unseasonable thoughts in duty ? How may a bosom-sin be discovered and mortified ?*' &c. Would not this course have tended more to the honor of religion and the comfort of souls ? I am ashamed that the professors of this generation are yet insensible of their folly. O, that God would

turn their disputes and contentions into practical godliness!

*Second*: Worldly cares and encumbrances have greatly increased the neglect of our hearts. The heads and hearts of multitudes have been filled with such a crowd and noise of worldly business that they have lamentably declined in their zeal, their love, their delight in God, and their heavenly, serious, and profitable way of conversing with men. How miserably have we entangled ourselves in this wilderness of trifles ! Our discourses, our conferences, nay, our very prayers are tinged with it. We have had so much to do without, that we have been able to do but little within. And how many precious opportunities have we thus lost ? How many admonitions of the Spirit have passed over unfruitfully ? How often has the Lord called to us, when our worldly thoughts have prevented us from hearing ? But there certainly is a way to enjoy God even in our worldly employments. If we lose our views of him when engaged in our temporal affairs, the fault is our own. Alas ! that Christians should stand at the door of eternity, having more work upon their hands than their time is sufficient for, and yet be filling their heads and hearts with trifles !

3. I infer, lastly, for the awakening of all, that if the keeping of the heart be the great work of a Christian, then there are but few real Christians in the world. If every one who has learned the dialect of Christianity, and who can talk like a saint ; if every one who has gifts and parts, and who can make shift to preach, pray, or discourse like a Christian : in a word, if all such as associate with the people of God and partake of ordinances may pass for Christians, then indeed the number is great. But alas ! how few can he found, if you judge them by this rule ; how few are there who conscientiously keep their hearts, watch their thoughts and look scrupulously to their motives ! Indeed there are few *closet-men* among professors. It is easier for men to be reconciled to any other duties in religion than to these.

The profane part of the world will not so much as meddle with the outside of any religious duties, and least of all with these; and as to the hypocrite, though he may be very particular in externals, you can never persuade him to undertake this inward, this difficult work; this work, to which there is no inducement from human applause ; this

work, which would quickly discover what the hypocrite cares not to know : so that by general consent this heart-work is left to the hands of a few retired ones, and I tremble to think in how few hands it is.

II. If the keeping of the heart be so important a business ; if such great advantages result from it ; if so many valuable interests be wrapped up in it, then let me call upon the people of God everywhere to engage heartily in this work. O, study your hearts, watch your hearts, keep your hearts ! Away with fruitless controversies and all idle questions ; away with empty names and vain shows ; away with unprofitable discourse and bold censures of others, and turn in upon yourselves. O, that this day, this hour, you would resolve upon doing so !

Reader, methinks I shall prevail with you. All that I beg for is this, that you would step aside oftener to talk with God and your own heart; that you would not suffer every trifle to divert you; that you would keep a more true and faithful account of your thoughts and affections ; that you would seriously demand of your own heart at least every evening, *‘O my heart, where hast thou been today, and what has engaged thy thoughts ?’*

If all that has been said by way of inducement be not enough, I have yet some motives to offer you:

1. The studying, observing, and diligently keeping your own heart, will surprisingly help you to understand the deep mysteries of religion. An honest, well experienced heart is an excellent help to the head. Such a heart will serve for a commentary on a great part of the Scriptures. By means of such a heart you will have a better understanding of divine things than the most learned, (graceless), man ever had, or can have; you will not only have a clearer, but a more interesting and profitable apprehension of them. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, the troubles and comforts of conscience, and the sweetness of communion with God, who never felt the efficacy and sweet impression of these things upon his own soul. But how dark and dry are his notions compared with those of an experienced Christian!

2. The study and observation of your own heart will powerfully secure you against the dangerous and infecting errors of the times in which you live. For what think you is the reason why so many professors have departed from the faith, giving heed to fables ? Why have so many been led away by the error of the wicked ? Why have those who have sown corrupt doctrines had such plentiful harvests among us, but because they have met with a race of professors who never knew what belongs to practical godliness and the study and keeping of their hearts ?

3. Your care and diligence in keeping your heart will prove one of the best evidences of your sincerity. I know no external act of religion which truly distinguishes the sound from the unsound professor. It is marvellous how far hypocrites go in all external duties; how plausibly they can order the outward man, hiding all their indecencies from the observation of the world. But they take no heed to their hearts. They are not in secret what they appear to be in public. And before this test no hypocrite can stand. They may, indeed, in a fit of terror, or on a death-bed, cry out of the wickedness of their hearts; but such extorted complaints are wholly of no regard. No credit, in law, is to be given to the testimony of one upon the rack, because it may be supposed that the extremity of his torture will make him say anything to get relied. But if self-jealousy, care and watchfulness be the daily workings and frames of your heart, you have some evidence of your sincerity.

4. How comfortable and how profitable would all ordinances and duties be to you, if your heart was faithfully kept. What lively communion might you have with God every time you approach him, if your heart was in a right frame ! You might then say with David, *“My meditation of Him shall be sweet.”* It is the indisposition of the heart which renders ordinances, and secret duties so comfortless to some. They strive to raise their hearts to God, now pressing this argument upon them, then that, to quicken and affect them; yet they often get nearly through the exercise before their hearts begin to be interested in it; and some times they go away no better than they came. But the Christian whose heart is prepared by being constantly kept,

enters immediately and heartily into his duties; he outstrips his sluggish neighbor, gets the first sight of Christ in a sermon, the first seal of Christ in a sacrament, the first communication of grace and love in secret prayer. Now if there be anything valuable and comfortable in ordinances and private duties, look to your heart and keep it, I beseech you.

5. An acquaintance with your own heart will furnish you a fountain of matter in prayer. The man who is diligent in heart-work, will lie richly supplied with matter in his addresses to God. He will not be confused for want of thoughts; his tongue will not falter for want of expressions.

6. The most desirable thing in the world, viz. the revival of religion among a people, may be effected by means of what I am urging upon you.

O, that I might see the time when professors shall not walk in a vain show ; when they shall please themselves no more with a name to live, while they are spiritually dead ; when they shall be no more a company of frothy, vain persons; but when holiness shall shine in their conversation, and awe the world, and command reverence from all that are around them; when they shall warm the heart of those who come near them, and cause it to be said, “*God is in these men of a truth.*” And may such a time be expected ? Until heart-work becomes the business of professors, I have no hope of seeing a thing so blessed ! Does it not grieve you to see how religion is contemned and trampled under foot, and the professors of it ridiculed and scorned in the world? Professors, would you recover your credit ? Would you obtain an honourable testimony in the consciences of your very enemies ? *Then keep your hearts.*

7. By diligence in keeping our hearts we should prevent the occasions of fatal scandals and stumbling-blocks to the world. Woe to the world because of offences!

8. Keep your heart faithfully, and you will be prepared for any situation or service to which you may be called. This, and this only call

properly fit you for usefulness in any station ; but with this you can endure prosperity or adversity ; you can deny yourself, and turn your hand to any world. Thus Paul turned every circumstance to good account, and made himself so eminently useful. When he preached to others, he provided against being cast away himself : he kept his heart; and everything in which he excelled seems to have had a close connection with his diligence in keeping his heart.

9. If the people of God would diligently keep their hearts, their communion with each other would be unspeakably more inviting and profitable. Then ‘*how goodly would be thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel !*’ It is the fellowship which the people of God have with the Father and with the Son that kindles the desires of others to have communion with them. I tell you, that if saints would be persuaded to spend more time and take more pains about their hearts, there would soon be such a divine excellence in their conversation that others would account it no small privilege to be with or near them. It is the pride, passion and earthliness of our hearts, that has spoiled Christian fellowship. Why is it that when Christians meet they are often jarring and contending, but because their passions are unmortified ? Whence come their uncharitable censures of their brethren, but from their ignorance of themselves ? Why are they so rigid and unfeeling toward those who have fallen, but because they do not feel their own weakness and liability to temptation ? Why is their discourse so light and unprofitable when they meet, but because their hearts are earthly and vain ? But now, if Christians would study their hearts more and keep them better, the beauty and glory of communion would be restored. They would divide no more, contend no more, censure rashly no more. They will feel right one toward another, when each is daily humbled under a sense of the evil of his own heart.

10. Lastly : Keep your heart, and then the comforts of the Spirit and the influence of all ordinances will be more fixed and lasting than they now are. ‘*And do the consolations of God seem small to you?*’ Ah, you have reason to be ashamed that the ordinances of God, as to their quickening and comforting effects, should make so light and transient an impression on your heart.



Now, reader, consider well these special benefits of keeping the heart which I have mentioned. Examine their importance. Are they small matters ? Is it a small matter to have your understanding assisted; your endangered soul revered safe ; your sincerity proved ; your communion with God sweetened ; your heart filled with matter for prayer ? Is it a small thing to have the power of godliness ; all fatal scandals removed ; an instrumental fitness to serve Christ obtained ; the communion of saints restored to its primitive glory; and the influence of ordinances abiding in the souls of saints ? If these are no common blessings, no ordinary benefits, then surely it is a great and indispensable duty to keep the heart with all diligence.

And now are you inclined to undertake the business of keeping your heart ? Are you resolved upon it ? I charge you, then, to engage in it earnestly. Away with every cowardly feeling, and make up your mind to encounter difficulties. Draw your armour from the word of God. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in its commands, its promises, its threatenings; let it be fixed in your understanding, your memory, your conscience, your affections. You must learn to wield the sword of the Spirit, (which is the word of God), familiarly, if you would defend your heart and conquer your enemies.

You must call yourself frequently to an account; examine yourself as in the presence of the all seeing God; bring your conscience, as it were, to the bar of judgment. Beware how you plunge yourself into a multiplicity of worldly business; how you practise upon the maxims of the world; and how you venture at all to indulge your depraved propensities.

You must exercise the utmost vigilance to discover and check the first symptoms of departure from God, the least decline of spirituality, or the least indisposition to meditation by yourself, and holy conversation and fellowship with others.

These things you must undertake, in the strength of Christ, with invincible resolution in the outset. And if you thus engage in this great work, be assured you shall not spend your strength for naught; comforts which you never felt or thought of will flow in upon you from every side. The diligent prosecution of this work will constantly afford you the most powerful excitements to vigilance and ardour in the life of faith, while it increases our strength and wears out your enemies.

And when you have kept your heart with all diligence a little while, when you have fought the battles of this spiritual warfare, gained the ascendancy over the corruptions within, and vanquished the enemies without, then God will open the gate of heaven to you, and give you the portion which is promised to them that overcome. Awake then, this moment; get the world under your feet, pant not for the things which a man may have, and eternally lose his soul; but bless God that you may have his service here, and the glory hereafter which he appoints to his chosen.

*"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."*

## John Flavel

During the Plague of London, in 1665, a few Christian friends were gathered for prayer in a private house in Convent Garden; but, as it was an unlawful assembly, the soldiers broke in with drawn swords and arrested the worshippers. They were committed to Newgate prison, where the pestilence was raging; and an old minister from the country, Mr. Richard Flavel, and his wife, caught the infection, and were released only to die.

Their eldest son was also at this time a minister. Although he did not become a musician or a poet, as his mother had hoped, this nobler vocation was his destiny. As a minister and author, he transmitted the joyful sound of the gospel through the dark reigns of Charles and James the Second; and of all who sang songs in that night, few found listeners so eager and grateful as John Flavel.

In 1656, when he was about twenty-six years of age, the people of Dartmouth, in Devon, chose him as their minister. Going amongst them on their own invitation, and in all the freshness of his affections, he and the inhabitants became ardently attached to one another. With his fund of striking incidents, with his faculty of happy illustration, with a temperament in which cheerfulness and solemnity were remarkably blended, and with a style of address in which friendly encouragement alternated with grave remonstrance and melting pathos, except among the worst reprobates, his ministry was boundlessly popular. And when he went from home, his plain and arresting discourses were so often the means of awakening or converting careless hearers, that he was induced to extend his labours far beyond the bounds of his own large parish.

The period, however, was brief during which he was allowed to ply such a free and unfettered ministry. Ejected by the Act of Uniformity, for some time he endeavoured to keep together and

instruct the members of his flock; but spies and penal laws made their meetings difficult and dangerous. At last the Oxford Act was promulgated, and according to its terms, Mr. Flavel could no longer reside in Dartmouth. On the day of his departure, the inhabitants accompanied him as far as the churchyard of Townstall, where, amidst prayers and tears, they parted. Nevertheless, his heart was still with his beloved people. He took up his abode as near them as the letter of the law allowed; and, sometimes in Dartmouth itself, sometimes in a quiet apartment in a neighbouring village, and sometimes in a wood or other sheltered spot in the open air, he contrived to meet a detachment of them almost every Sabbath day.

At last King James' Indulgence permitted the open resumption of his ministry. A commodious meeting-house was built, and there, for the remaining years of his life, he continued to warn, exhort, and comfort all who came, with a fervour of which the tradition has not yet died out in Devon. His prayers were wonderful. Much of his retirement was spent in devotional exercises; and in the great congregation he was sometimes seized with such agonies of earnestness, or carried away in such a rapture of praise and thanksgiving, that it seemed as if the tabernacle of clay must perish amidst the excessive emotion. At last, towards the end of June, 1691, he presided at a meeting of the Nonconformist ministers of Devonshire. The object was to bring about a union of Presbyterians and Independents. The preliminary resolutions passed unanimously, and *'Mr. Flavel closed the work of the day with prayer and praise, in which his spirit was carried out with wonderful enlargement and affection.'* On the 26th, he wrote to a London minister an account of this auspicious meeting, and appeared remarkably cheerful and happy. But that evening, he was taken with the palsy, and soon died.

No period of English history has been so fruitful in religious literature as the half-century between the commencement of the Parliamentary War and the glorious Revolution; or we might say, the period included in the publishing career of Richard Baxter. But amidst that enormous authorship there are few books which retain so much attraction for modern readers as some of Flavel's practical treatises, such as *On Keeping the Heart*. For their enduring popularity, they are, no doubt, in some degree indebted to their kind, affable, and earnest

tone; but still more, we presume, is due to the skill and felicity with which matters of the greatest moment are expounded. With a view to be useful, the writer's great anxiety was to be understood, and he sought out the words and the modes of representation which might suit the sailors of Dartmouth and Plymouth, and the farmers of Devon and Dorset. His books abound in anecdote, and they are rich in those homely metaphors and ingenious comparisons which are an effective ingredient in popular oratory. Above all, they command the reader's attention, by the importance of the themes which they handle; they secure his confidence, by their unaffected seriousness and deep sincerity; and they win his heart, by the evangelical warmth and personal kindness with which they are all aglow. End.